

# The Path to Self-Fulfilment

*Based upon the Qur'an and the Sunnah  
of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)*

Umm Abdurrahman Sakina Hirschfelder





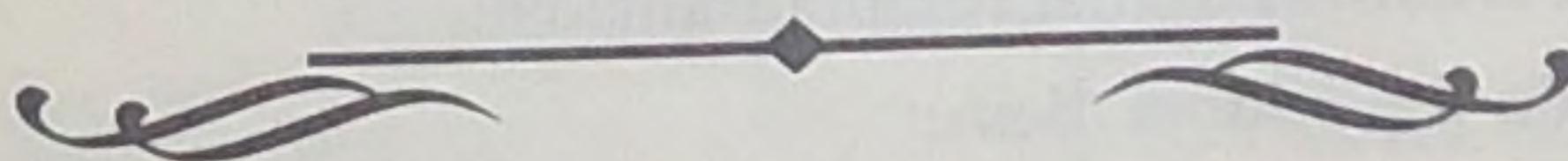
IN THE NAME OF

**ALLAH**

THE ALL-COMPASSIONATE, ALL-MERCIFUL



**The Path  
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## PRONUNCIATION AND TRANSLITERATION CHART

Arabic script	Pronunciation	Transliterated form
ا	short 'a', as in <i>cat</i>	a
آ - ي	longer 'a', as in <i>cab</i> (not as in <i>cake</i> )	â
ب	/b/ as in <i>bell</i> , <i>rubber</i> and <i>tab</i>	b
ت	/t/ as in <i>tap</i> , <i>mustard</i> and <i>sit</i>	t
ة	takes the sound of the preceding diacritical mark sometimes ending in h (when in pausal form): ah, ih or ooh; or atu(n), ati(n) or ata(n) when uninterrupted	h or t (when followed by another Arabic word)
ث	/th/ as in <i>thing</i> , <i>maths</i> and <i>wealth</i>	th
ج	/j/ as in <i>jam</i> , <i>ajar</i> and <i>age</i>	j
ح	a 'harsher' sound than the English initial /h/, and may occur medially and in word-final position as well	h
خ	as in <i>Bach</i> (in German); may occur initially and medially as well	kh
د	/d/ as in <i>do</i> , <i>muddy</i> and <i>red</i>	d



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Arabic script	Pronunciation	Transliterated form
ذ	as in <i>this</i> , <i>father</i> and <i>smooth</i>	dh
ر	/r/ as in <i>raw</i> , <i>arid</i> and <i>war</i> ; may also be a rolled 'r', as pronounced in Spanish	r
ز	/z/ as in <i>zoo</i> , <i>easy</i> and <i>gaze</i>	z
س	/s/ as in <i>so</i> , <i>messy</i> and <i>grass</i>	s
ش	as in <i>ship</i> , <i>ashes</i> and <i>rush</i>	sh
ص	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /sw/ or /s/ farther back in the mouth	ʃ
ض	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /d/ farther back in the mouth	ɖ
ط	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /t/ farther back in the mouth	ɟ
ظ	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing 'the' farther back in the mouth	dh
ع	no close equivalent in English: a guttural sound in the back of the throat	ʕ

Arabic script	Pronunciation	Transliterated form
غ	no close equivalent in English, but may be closely approximated by pronouncing it like the French /r/ in 'rouge'	gh
ف	/f/ as in <i>fill</i> , <i>effort</i> and <i>muff</i>	f
ق	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /k/ farther back in the mouth	q
ك	/k/ as in <i>king</i> , <i>buckle</i> and <i>tack</i>	k
ل	/l/ as in <i>lap</i> , <i>halo</i> ; in the word Allah, it becomes velarized as in <i>ball</i>	l
م	/m/ as in <i>men</i> , <i>simple</i> and <i>ram</i>	m
ن	/n/ as in <i>net</i> , <i>ant</i> and <i>can</i>	n
ه - و - ا	/h/ as in <i>hat</i> ; unlike /h/ in English, in Arabic /h/ is pronounced in medial and word-final positions as well	h
و	as in <i>wet</i> and <i>away</i>	w
و	long 'u', as in <i>boot</i> and <i>too</i>	oo
ي	as in <i>yard</i> and <i>mayo</i>	y
ي	long 'e', as in <i>eat</i> , <i>beef</i> and <i>see</i>	ee



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Arabic script	Pronunciation	Transliterated form
ء	glottal stop: may be closely approximated by pronouncing it like 't' in the Cockney English pronunciation of <i>butter</i> : <i>bu'er</i> , or the stop sound in <i>uh-oh</i> !	(omitted in initial position)

**Diphthongs**

Arabic script	Pronunciation	Transliterated form
أو، وَاو	long 'o', as in <i>owe</i> , <i>boat</i> and <i>go</i>	au, aw
أَي، يَاو	long 'a', as in <i>aid</i> , <i>rain</i> and <i>say</i>	ay, ai, ei

**Diacritical marks (tashkeel)**

Name of mark	Pronunciation	Transliterated form
َ fathah	very short 'a' or schwa (unstressed vowel)	a
ِ kasrah	shorter version of ee or schwa (unstressed vowel)	i
ُ dammah	shorter version of oo	u
ّ shaddah	a doubled consonant is stressed in the word, and the length of the sound is also doubled	double letter
◌ sukoon	no vowel sound between consonants or at the end of a word	absence of vowel

## ARABIC HONORIFIC SYMBOLS USED IN THIS BOOK

(سُبْحَانَكَ): *Subhânahu wa Ta'âlâ* – Glorified and Exalted is He

(سَلَامٌ): *Ṣalla Allâhu 'alayhi wa sallam* – Blessings and peace be upon him

(عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام): *'Alayhi as-salâm* – Peace be upon him

(رَضِيَ): *Raḍiya Allâhu 'anhu* – May Allah be pleased with him

(رَضِيَ): *Raḍiya Allâhu 'anhâ* – May Allah be pleased with her

## HADITH GRADE TERMS IN THIS BOOK

Sound: *ṣaḥeeḥ*

Reliable: *ḥasan*

Weak: *ḍa'eef*

Odd: *ghareeb*

Authentic: includes sound, reliable, or any grade in between

Acceptable: *sakat 'anhu*; the grader of the hadith did not comment on it, meaning that he found nothing unacceptable in it



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## ABOUT THE WORD *LORD*

The word *lord* in English has several related meanings. The original meaning is 'master' or 'ruler', and in this sense it is often used to refer to human beings: 'the *lord* of the mansion' or 'Lord So-and-So' (in the United Kingdom, for example). The word *Lord* with a capital L is used in the lexicon of Islam to refer to the One and Only God – Allah. In Islam, there is no ambiguity about the meaning of this word. While it is true that one may occasionally use the word *lord* (whether capitalized or not) to refer to a human being, in Islamic discourse the reference of this term is always clear from the context. Whereas for Christians, Hindus and other polytheists, the word *Lord* with a capital L may refer to Allah, to Jesus or to some imagined deity, for Muslims, there can be no plurality of meaning. Allah alone is the Lord, and the Lord is Allah – not Jesus, not Rama, not any other being.

The Editor



## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

All praise and thanks belong to Allah alone, the One, the Almighty, and All-Merciful. Blessings and peace be upon Prophet Muhammad, the last of His Messengers and Prophets, and upon his family, his Companions, and all those who follow in his footsteps until the end of time.

Today, people all over the world seem more depressed than ever, continually seeking contentment and happiness. It is a pity that many of us believe that attaining satisfaction in life depends on our material achievements and on the attitudes of others towards us.

*The Path to Self-Fulfilment* demonstrates that all individuals have the potential to achieve happiness and contentment in life because self-fulfilment is not, in fact, dependent upon others or upon our material well-being. In reality, it has to do with our own attitudes towards life as well as towards others. The author also discusses at length the role of spiritual wellbeing, in the form of the implementation of the Islamic teachings of forgiveness and trust in Allah, on the road to self-fulfilment. We hope that this book will motivate its readers to take charge of their own lives and embark upon the rewarding journey towards happiness and contentment.

May Allah accept the efforts of all those who contributed to the production of this book, and may it be acceptable to Him. *Âmeen*.

**Muhammad Abdul Mohsin Al-Tuwaijri**  
Managing Director  
International Islamic Publishing House  
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

## INTRODUCTION

Indeed all praise is due to Allah (*Subhânahu wa Ta'âlâ* – Glorified and Exalted is He); we praise Him, seek His help and beseech His forgiveness. We seek refuge with Allah from the evil of ourselves and the evil of our actions. No one can misguide the one whom Allah guides; similarly, no one can guide the one whom Allah does not guide. We testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that Muhammad (*ṣalla Allâhu 'alayhi wa sallam* – blessings and peace be upon him) is His slave and messenger.

Amongst the available literature directed specifically towards Muslims, there is a dearth of information related to improving the inner self. This is a vital topic, for it is the inner self that is responsible for acquiring a place either in paradise or hell in the next life. The soul, the psyche, the mind, and the heart – these parts of the human being are essential in maintaining the equilibrium and thus maintaining happiness.

The mind is powerful, controlling much of our souls, our thinking, and even our physical wellbeing. It can bring happiness or sadness, satisfaction or depression, and calmness or anxiety, so we must use it to ensure that we enjoy life and live it to its fullest. We must utilize our talents, appreciate our imperfections, accept ourselves, and appreciate what Allah has given us in this life.

Allah is the source of all strength and of satisfaction and tranquillity in our souls. He is the One in Whom we must put our trust and our hopes.



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We all have the ability to choose the direction in which our lives flow. We have the ability to make our dreams come true. We have the ability to create our own happiness.

This book is intended to aid those who wish to live a fulfilling life based upon the love of Allah and the love of self. Although the latter may sound narcissistic, we must consider that we cannot love others until we love ourselves. Love of the self is exhibited in self-confidence and self-acceptance. It is the beginning of a self-fulfilling life and the basis for loving Allah. Allah (ﷻ) has created each and every one of us; therefore, loving the self means loving Allah's creation and loving the Creator.

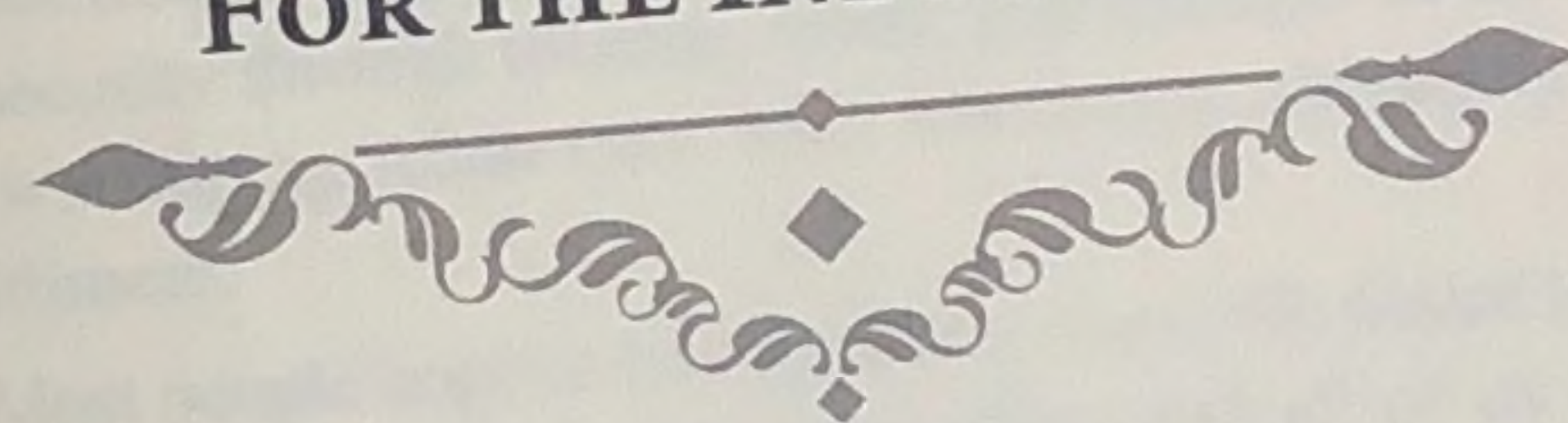
Herein we present essential facets of self-fulfilment. First, we explore issues concerning the individual: self-acceptance, self-confidence, determination, self-observation, self-improvement, and stress relief. Next, we delve into elements that are essential to healthy relationships: effective communication and forgiveness. Finally, as the end result of implementing this knowledge, we examine the issue of happiness, which is another crucial matter involved in loving Allah. How can we really display and realize our love of Allah if we spend our lives in a depressed state? Topics such as trusting Allah, accepting Allah's will in our lives, and sharing our blessings are addressed as part of understanding how to attain true happiness.

For those who prefer a hands-on approach to implementing new knowledge, we have included a section for the practical application of this information. It includes blank pages for personal remarks and space to make a goals plan to achieve positive results: a happy soul, a sound psyche, and a peaceful heart.

I pray that this book is beneficial to all its readers and that all Muslims are revitalized with faith in Allah, love of Him, and peace within their souls.

*Sakina Hirschfelder*

## FOR THE INDIVIDUAL





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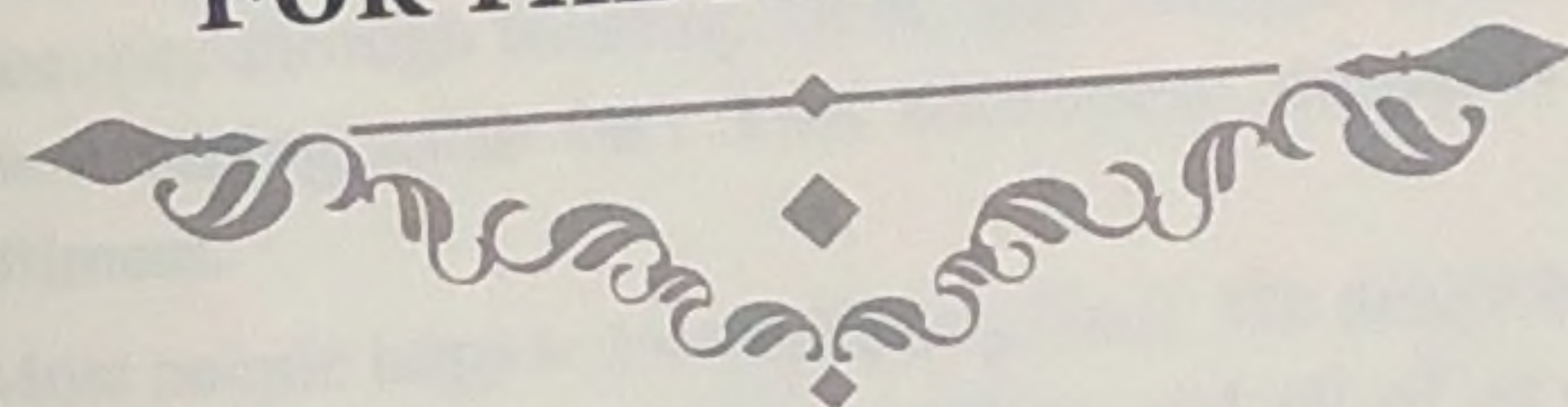
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It was narrated by Abu 'Abdullâh an-Nu'mân (*radiya Allâhu 'anhu* – may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Truly, in the body there is a morsel of flesh which, if it is whole, all the body is whole and which, if it is diseased, all of the body is diseased. Truly, it is the heart.» (Bukhari)

Our hearts are genuinely whole when we find peace in loving Allah, security through trusting Allah, and strength in having faith in and worshiping Allah (ﷻ). This wholeness ultimately leads to self-fulfilment.

Most people hope to live fulfilling lives. We desire happiness, satisfaction, achievement, and tranquillity, and all of us can attain this. It is completely within reach with the right mindset, which is something that we all can control and create for ourselves.

Life can seem like a puzzle sometimes, but it is a very simple one (even though it may not always appear to be) containing a few key pieces amongst others. Granted, there are a lot of pieces that need to be put into place, but we are not responsible for putting all those pieces in the right places; Allah does much of that for us. We have control, yes, and we must do our best to put together the puzzle correctly, but there is a point when we must also trust that Allah will fill in the missing pieces – that He will put the final touches on our effort.

The following story illustrates that Allah has complete control and has already written everything that will occur:



«The Prophet (ﷺ) said: Once, prophets Adam ('alayhi as-salâm – peace be upon him) and Moses (ﷺ) argued.

Moses said: You are Adam, whom Allah created with His Hand, into whom He breathed His spirit, to whom He made the angels prostrate, and whom He taught the names of everything; why have you expelled us and yourself from paradise?

Adam replied: You are Moses, whom Allah favoured with His message and His words. Have you not found that they had been written about me before I was created?

He said: Yes, indeed.

Then he (Prophet Muhammad [ﷺ]) said: Adam got the better of Moses in the argument.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Understanding this concept gives us perspective in our own lives. There are some things that just need to be left in Allah's Hands because ultimately whatever happens has already been written for us anyway. Therefore, there is no reason to grow anxious or worried about the pieces of the puzzle that we cannot place. They will be placed by Allah according to an existing decree.

The simplicity of this puzzle, however, often becomes lost in the drama of life, when it is overshadowed with crises and heartaches. Still, a few well-placed pieces can go a long way, and when put together properly, the puzzle of life is joyous, peaceful, successful, and ultimately fulfilling.

The first piece that must be part of our psyche is self-acceptance. When we accept ourselves for who we are, for the way Allah created us, with all of our talents and imperfections, we can begin to grasp self-fulfilment. Self-acceptance, the most important piece, culminates in self-love.

Self-love is vital to our ability to share love with others and with Allah. We are not talking about narcissism here. Narcissism is self-love that goes over the top into arrogance, haughtiness, and

egotism. Self-love, on the other hand, is tied to self-confidence and self-acceptance; it is a necessary aspect of self-fulfilment.

Along with self-acceptance, we need self-confidence and determination before we can be happy with our lives and content within our souls. These are not pieces that everyone initially possesses, and finding them may take personal work, inner reflection, and deep thought. For the individual, these can be used in the process of self-improvement – making positive changes in our lives for the sake of Allah as well as for ourselves. Self-improvement is not possible without first undertaking self-observation, which involves taking account of the self by looking inwardly in search of weaknesses or negative traits. Identifying the source of these traits is often the key to changing them and replacing them with positive traits. Acquiring all of these pieces is crucial to living a fulfilling life filled with love, contentment, and peace.

Once we attain self-acceptance, we can look towards building self-confidence. These two items are, in fact, intimately linked and part of each other. Self-confidence is the basis for being able to function constructively within society. It gives us the assurance we need to blossom within relationships, whether with family members, friends, neighbours, or co-workers. It provides us with the confidence to develop connections that may benefit us in the present or the future. Determination is also needed to achieve goals and to realize dreams. Everyone has this ability; we simply need to tap into our inner strength and find the drive to accomplish what we desire.

When we make the decision to improve ourselves and to seek true contentment within our lives, we need to master the art of self-observation. Looking inwardly to ascertain our imperfections and our strengths is the first step towards making positive changes.

Each of these individual pieces is tied to the others and cannot exist fully without them. Self-acceptance and self-confidence are



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necessary for self-determination. Relaxation and stress relief are also necessary for being resolute and for achieving our goals. Self-observation is a basis for self-confidence as well as self-improvement. Determination creates a source of positive change. Self-acceptance is a foundation upon which determination can be built. Alongside this, stress relief, which generates peacefulness within, is essential for accepting ourselves, being confident about who we are, and achieving our dreams. As you read through the following sections, you may notice some of the rhetoric being repeated as it relates to each individual piece of the puzzle. Intertwined, these pieces can uplift and fulfil the soul.

Self-fulfilment goes beyond individual effort, though. Having healthy relationships is a huge part of self-fulfilment as well. We do not live in a vacuum; we must interact with others on all levels – personal (family, friends, and neighbours), associate (co-workers), and societal.

In order to create dynamic relationships, we must communicate effectively and be willing to forgive others. With this understanding in hand, as well as the knowledge required for individual improvement, we can be well on our way to living a full and satisfying life.

Ultimately, what really matters in life are the riches of our inner life (spirituality and closeness to Allah), our health and happiness, and the joy and love we can give to and receive from others. To begin the quest for such fulfilment, self-acceptance is the first piece for the individual to master.

### ATTAINING SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Many of us drift through life without really accepting ourselves for who we are deep inside. We wonder who we are, what

we want out of life, and where we are going. This mindset of not being ourselves, or of not accepting ourselves with all of our quirks and imperfections, can be toxic. Self-acceptance is important as the base of a healthy psyche, but this base needs to be understood in the light of Allah's mercy and creation.

### Our unique creation

Allah (ﷻ) created each of us with unique personalities, traits, and ambitions. No two of us are exactly the same, and this is something tremendous and exceptional about us. Our uniqueness is something of which we should be proud. Since it was Allah Who created us, how can we not accept ourselves for who we are? How can we not love ourselves? How can we not be satisfied and confident in ourselves? We need to be pleased with Allah's creation: in this case, ourselves. Allah is infinitely merciful and has blessed each and every one of us with certain strengths as well as weaknesses. Weaknesses are nothing to be ashamed of; they are simply issues that need to be worked on or accepted as they are.

We all have certain ingrained personality traits. As long as there is nothing negative or harmful about them, there is no reason to renounce them. There is no reason to try to change them for the sake of anyone else. If you dislike a particular characteristic and want to change it as a way of improving yourself, this can be a reason to change. You have the capacity to define who you are; otherwise, you must accept yourself as you are. Indeed, Allah has created you in this manner for a purpose, and there is no reason to deny His unique creation. Thank Allah for making you the way you are, and seek to love yourself.

Allah attests to our uniqueness and diversity; this is part of the beauty of His creation, as He mentions:



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﴿وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ﴾  
(سورة الروم: الآية ٢٢)

«And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colours. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge.»  
(Qur'an 30: 22)<sup>1</sup>

There is no point in trying to be someone you are not. Be yourself. No one can ever be you; you are unique and valuable. Allah affirms:

﴿قُلْ كُلٌّ يَعْمَلُ عَلَىٰ شَاكِلَتِهِ...﴾  
(سورة الإسراء: الآية ٨٤)

«Say: Each works according to his manner [disposition]...»  
(Qur'an 17: 84)

To copy the characteristics or the personality of another is neither natural nor conducive to happiness. Shaykh 'Ā'idh al-Qarni writes regarding this:

To melt into the personality of another, for whatever reason, is akin to suicide, and to imitate the natural traits of others is to deliver a death blow to one's own self. Among Allah's signs that one should marvel at are the diverse characteristics of people... Therefore, be comfortable with your inherent talents and abilities. Develop them, expand them, and benefit from them.<sup>2</sup>

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﴿إِنَّ سَعْيَكُمْ لَشَتَّىٰ﴾  
(سورة الليل: الآية ٤)

«Indeed, your efforts are diverse.»  
(Qur'an 92: 4)

It is natural that human beings will have various goals, intentions, needs, and characteristics. This diversity is beneficial and exciting. Recognize its beauty and the beauty of you being you.

## Self-worth

“If you do not value yourself independently of your achievements, you will not value your achievements.”<sup>3</sup>

You cannot accept yourself without valuing yourself a great deal. This quote is indeed poignant, and it contradicts much of what is conventionally thought about self-worth. Many people place the highest value on their accomplishments, but this attitude can be dangerous. The logical conclusion is that if you have not accomplished anything you feel is noteworthy, then you are not valuable. Valuing yourself independent of your achievements gives you the strength to withstand self-doubt.

Value is within; it cannot be lost by doing something bad, just as it cannot be gained by doing something good. Sometimes your actions may be generous and virtuous, and at other times they may not be; none of us is perfect. If you slip, seek forgiveness from Allah. You are still a worthy individual.

The greatest value you can achieve is your value in the sight of Allah. You must become aware that you have an intrinsic value in His view.

﴿...إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ...﴾  
(سورة حجرات: الآية ١٣)

«...Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you...»  
(Qur'an 49: 13)

None of us is worth more or less than anyone else. We are on an equal footing with all others except for our level of piety, which is known by Allah alone. This value, based upon your creation, is your ultimate value. It is a necessary realization – that true worth and value are found only in Allah's opinion.

We have a tendency to believe that some people are more valuable than others. This idea is a fallacy. For instance, people



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We have a tendency to believe that some people are more valuable than others. This idea is a fallacy. For instance, people



often hold doctors to be valuable because they help people. In order for doctors to be of value, though, the people they help must also be of value. It is only because we believe that each of us has worth that we can argue that anyone else does. It certainly does not make sense to value others but not ourselves. We are just as important as anyone else.

Valuing yourself is not egotistic or selfish; in fact, it is part of a healthy psyche. Arrogance is in valuing yourself more than others. Avoiding arrogance does not mean that you should avoid valuing yourself. It is important to acknowledge the value of all people, even if you disagree with them, and you yourself are included in that category of all people.

Valuing yourself provides a foundation for being generous and open with others. It provides a foundation for fruitful relationships, success, and achievement in society and in shaping your life. Valuing yourself provides inner strength that can help you in the face of suffering. Valuing yourself means respecting yourself – owning a healthy dose of self-esteem. In contrast, if you do not value yourself, you end up undermining yourself and dissipating your strength.

### Love yourself

When you realize that you have self-worth, you will be able to love yourself, which is a prerequisite to loving others and loving Allah. Allah (ﷻ) is merciful, compassionate, and loving; you must be merciful, compassionate, and loving towards yourself as well. Compassion for all living things is required, and this includes having compassion towards yourself. Part of faith is loving Allah's creation, which includes you. When you have compassion for yourself, you understand and accept yourself.

‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Do not harm the Muslims, do not revile them, and do not follow their faults. Verily, whoever follows the faults of his brother Muslim, Allah will follow his faults, and he whose faults are followed, Allah will disgrace him even inside his dwelling.» (at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Hibbân; the grade for this hadith is acceptable)

This *hadith* (a statement or action of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that was remembered and recorded by his Companions and followers)<sup>4</sup> is usually taken as advice for creating peace and harmony amongst people. It is indeed sound advice on how to treat others, but it is also sound advice on how to treat yourself. You are within the category of Muslims and therefore deserve to treat yourself with the same respect. You should not follow your own faults or become distraught over them. You should not revile your own self. You must value yourself and be kind towards yourself.

The story of Hakim illustrates that it is not always easy to implement this. Hakim grew up in an abusive home, where his father regularly beat his mother for petty reasons like making the food too salty. Hakim felt the wrath of his father through his father's words; he was called a failure, a louse, a good-for-nothing, and a moron.

As an adult, Hakim was never happy. He had a knack for perceiving all the events in his life negatively. Nothing good ever seemed to happen to him. (Of course it did; he just never noticed.)

Hakim was a computer analyst. Whenever a co-worker asked for his help because of his excellent skills, he would complain to his friends that this co-worker was demanding and arrogant, instead of recognizing that the co-worker came to him because he was a valuable asset to the company. If he committed the simplest of errors, such as spilling coffee on his shirt, he would call himself an idiot. When he lost his job, he turned to self-destructive behaviour, bashing his arm against a brick wall multiple times. Hakim never



learned to value himself during his childhood, and he carried this concept over into adulthood. He was in desperate need of being kind towards himself and valuing himself. His story may seem extreme, but many people have bits of Hakim in them.

There is a sad tendency to play back the often unkind, unhelpful, or destructive comments and judgements that are silently said to the self. This indicates the enormity of the challenge of self-acceptance. These thoughts cannot exist alongside healthy self-esteem and self-love. The reality is that if we were to speak such words aloud, addressed to someone else, we might realize their destructive nature.

For instance, we might think, "That's idiotic," about something we did, while we would not even think of saying such words to someone else. We must not be unkind to ourselves. We must not criticize our bodies, belittle our efforts, or use negative words towards ourselves. If we were to look at ourselves from the outside, as if looking at another person, we might be able to see the truth more honestly. We would not see the need to degrade ourselves because we would recognize our strong points. We do this for others, so why not do it for ourselves? It is a biased view that we hold towards ourselves; we need to get rid of it.

Focus on your strong points, speak positive words of reinforcement to yourself, and keep negative comments about yourself out of your head. Treat yourself fairly and with compassion.

Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: «Indeed Allah is gentle and loves gentleness.» (A reliable hadith recorded by Ibn Majâh and Ibn Hibbân)

Being gentle towards yourself is part of the self-love that creates a whole heart and a joyous soul.

Self-love also means pleasing yourself or living your life in a way that makes you happy. Some of us have a tendency to please

others before, or instead of, ourselves. You cannot live your entire life always pleasing others to the detriment of your own happiness. You must love yourself enough to please yourself.

### Self-esteem

Compassion and love for yourself are essential for high self-esteem. You must have enough respect for yourself to make choices that truly nourish your wellbeing.

Feeling good about yourself is what self-esteem is all about. Your underlying attitude about yourself must be an attitude of high self-esteem and self-love. Feeling worthless or negative holds you back and creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. Self-esteem is a mirror through which everything else is experienced.

In order to build self-esteem, you can utilize strategies such as the following:

- Acknowledge your talents and good qualities to fight any prejudice against yourself.
- Silence the inner critic of self-blame. Fight back with positive self-talk.
- End the self-judgement and destroy that inner critic.
- Try your best. Perfection does not exist among human beings.
- Develop friendships that make you feel good.

Self-esteem is not constant. It varies and is susceptible to setbacks, so you should work on it continually. With healthy, high self-esteem comes healthy self-love, which is essential for sharing love, for truly worshipping Allah with love, and for attaining personal happiness.



### Don't be judgemental towards yourself

Being judgemental towards yourself prevents self-acceptance, self-love, and high self-esteem. Judging yourself and feeling that you have not met some elusive goal or level only causes inner pain. When you reject a part of yourself because you feel you have not lived up to some imagined standard, you damage the psychological structures that keep you alive. You must stop the judgements. This is vital to psychological health.

It was narrated by 'Â'ishah (*raḍiya Allâhu 'anhâ* – may Allah be pleased with her) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«None of you should say: My soul has become evil. He should say: My soul has become annoyed.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

This hadith illustrates the error of self-judgement, and we have been advised specifically against it. We should not speak negatively towards ourselves, but rather find an excuse or positivity elsewhere. Self-judgement and disapproval get us nowhere.

Being non-judgemental towards yourself creates a base upon which to build self-esteem and self-acceptance; your thoughts virtually control your level of self-esteem. To prevent self-judgement and negativity, repeat self-accepting statements until you believe them. These could be phrases such as: "I am worthy", "I am talented", and "I deserve good".

You can change how you feel about yourself. You can fill your heart with positivity. You can be and you deserve to be non-judgemental towards yourself. You are valuable, honourable, loved, and gifted.

### Embrace your imperfections

Once the self-judgement has ended, you might realize that you still have characteristics that are not the best. We all have quirks

and imperfections; they are nothing to be ashamed of or depressed about. You will never attain perfection because only Allah (ﷻ) is perfect. Embrace that idea, because it is a sign of Allah's mercy that He created you the way He did. As long as your imperfections are not negative, harmful, or disobedient to Allah, be satisfied with them. Laugh at them.

It was narrated by Ibn 'Abbâs (رضي الله عنه) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Every believing servant has a sin which he commits from time to time or a sin in which he persists and does not abandon until he leaves this world. Indeed, the believer was created as the one who is frequently tried and tested, who often repents and (then) forgets. When he is admonished, he accepts the admonition.» (A reliable hadith recorded by at-Ṭabarâni)

This clearly shows that none of us is perfect. Do not beat yourself up over this. Take it lightly and accept yourself fully, and if you have a habit of erring Islamically, ask Allah's forgiveness for your sins and strive to avoid them, for indeed Allah is the All-Forgiving.

For years, Malik tried to change his natural character. He was a procrastinator, and he saw this as a negative trait because he wanted to accomplish tasks more efficiently. It was not until his sister made a remark one day about self-acceptance that Malik realized he should just accept his procrastination instead of trying to fight himself. He always got things done by their deadlines, so ultimately there was no harm in it for him. His stress level dropped and his mood lightened after he accepted this about himself.

Zainab had always been sensitive and gullible. A sympathetic crier, she could cry in an instant over something that had nothing to do with her. It embarrassed her to feel tears coming while she was out in public, so she tried to hide this attribute of her personality. Zainab also believed anything that anyone told her. She rarely



caught sarcasm and often missed people's jokes. However, after some self-searching, she realized that these attributes were not negative. They just were what they were. She learned to accept her sensitive nature and to laugh at herself when she fell prey to her gullibility.

These are just a couple of stories about accepting traits that are not always seen as positive, but in which there is no real harm.

It was reported by Anas (رضي الله عنه) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Allah the Almighty has said: O son of Adam! As long as you call upon Me and ask Me, I shall forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind. O son of Adam! Were your sins to reach the clouds of the sky and were you then to ask My forgiveness, I would forgive you. O son of Adam! Were you to come to me with sins nearly as great as the earth and were you to face Me, ascribing no partner to Me, I would bring you forgiveness nearly as great as it (the earth) is.» (A good and sound hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

Remember this. The mercy of Allah knows no bounds. Seek His mercy and forgiveness, and He will forgive you.

There is no reason to become depressed over your imperfections. Accept your imperfections, and see the beauty in them and in Allah's creation of you.

### What acceptance means

Accepting yourself encompasses many characteristics, including having compassion for yourself, acknowledging who you are without any value judgements, having high self-esteem, truly loving yourself, valuing yourself with all of your imperfections included, respecting yourself, being your own helper and friend, and professing true faith in Allah while trusting in Him and loving Him and His creation of you.

It was narrated by Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: «Wealth is not in having many belongings, but wealth is the richness of the soul (contentment).» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Richness of the soul comes from self-acceptance. It comes from within and is a tranquillity that brings calmness and solace through faith and inner love. It also comes from believing completely in Allah's pre-ordainment. Your life is as it was meant to be. You are as you were meant to be. Embrace that. Richness of the soul is what you deserve, and you can acquire it.

It was narrated by 'Abdullâh ibn 'Amr (رضي الله عنه) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Show mercy to whatever is on Earth, and He who is in heaven will show mercy to you.» (An authentic hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood and at-Tirmidhi)

Show mercy towards yourself. Be compassionate towards yourself. Repeat: *Lâ ilâha illâ Allâh* (There is none worthy of worship other than God), and do not agonize over your sins. Ask Allah (ﷻ) for forgiveness, and love Him.

'Amr ibn 'Awf (رضي الله عنه) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Be happy and hope for what will please you.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Fill your soul with hope, which brings contentment and inner strength. Be happy and accept yourself as you are. See the beauty within you. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his essay *Self-Reliance*:

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till.<sup>5</sup>



## BUILDING SELF-CONFIDENCE

When you have come to peacefully and wholeheartedly accept yourself, with all your quirks and imperfections, you can begin to build the self-confidence needed to succeed in life. Life can always be viewed as a success because success is a mindset involving confidence, surety, and self-worth. With confidence and hard work, you can achieve anything you put your mind to. The only limits are what you create for yourself in your mind.

Self-acceptance and self-confidence go hand-in-hand. Accepting yourself is the first step in developing self-confidence. Once you accept yourself, it is only natural that you will also come to believe in yourself, which is what self-confidence is all about. Confidence comes from within, though. No one can give it to you; you must develop it yourself.

### The power of positive thinking

Positive thinking is a very powerful attitude that can give you the willpower and strength to be confident and achieve your aims. It may sound a little clichéd, but it truly works. Its opposite, negative thinking, surely will not take you in the right direction. Therefore, positive thinking is the only option with which to fill your mind. It brings about relaxation and a release of stress, which in turn leads to greater ability.

Part of the power of positive thinking can be found in hope, which offers solace amid affliction and difficult times, as well as tranquillity amid stressful times. Hope offers a potent advantage by bringing peace, without which life can seem discouraging. Peace of heart and mind can generate willpower and the strength to achieve goals.

Hope is being able to see yourself getting out of a predicament or accomplishing your goals. Hope motivates and reassures you so

that you do not give in to anxiety or fears, or develop a defeatist attitude. Hope is an attitude of positivity that nourishes the soul.

Another key element of positive thinking is burning enthusiasm, which generates an attitude of ardour. The strength of your convictions generates momentum to go forward. Drawing on this strength means pulling from the root of what you believe, from the base of who you are, from the core of your soul. This burning enthusiasm can spawn tremendous results. Direct your energy, focus your mind, and feel the passion in everything you do and everything you wish to accomplish. This positive attitude drives your effort and cannot be defeated.

### Emotional intelligence

When people talk about intelligence, they are usually referring to academic knowledge: maths, history, languages, and so on. A type that is even more valuable is emotional intelligence – the ability to motivate yourself, persist in the face of frustrations, regulate your moods and keep distress from swaying your ability to think.

Negative emotions can distract and preoccupy you, interfering with your attempts to focus elsewhere. The sad truth is that when powerful negative emotions fill your mind, you cannot concentrate fully on anything else. Whether it is job stress or a relationship problem that is causing the negative emotions, they can take over your mind and heart such that being productive becomes difficult. Being self-confident allows you to control these emotions and focus positively on them. You can counteract them with self-motivation and persistence, by directing your focus towards what you need to do.

This is where emotional intelligence becomes so important. Regulating your moods and your emotions is necessary if you are to be fruitful, confident and successful. The pinnacle of emotional



intelligence is when you become aware of your moods while you are experiencing them. You have thus gained the capacity to overcome them, and overcoming them opens the door to confidence.

An example of how strong emotions can distract our focus can be found in the following story. A college student had an exam to take and did not study for it as much as he should have. On the day of the exam, upon receiving it and looking at the problems, he realized that he did not know how to do most of them. He became paralysed by his emotions and froze up. He spent the next hour staring at the exam without writing a thing. When the time was up, he was forced to turn in a blank exam.

This student was literally overcome by his fear, so much so that he did not even try to recall what he knew or attempt to solve a single problem. The emotional brain has the ability to overpower the thinking brain. This is why emotional intelligence is so important. Being able to realize what you are feeling even as you are feeling it can give you the power to bypass any negativity. You can take a deep breath, refocus, and motivate yourself through self-talk.

### Self-talk

You must understand that there is no difficulty you cannot overcome. No one can tell you this, though; you must convince yourself. You must have conversations with your inner self, and this is where you can implement positive thinking. You must fill your mind with positive self-talk in order to succeed at your endeavours. Positive reinforcement from outside sources may be wonderful, but at some point it needs to come from within you. This is what self-talk is all about.

Most of us are prone to having a self-critic inside us. This inner critic tends to judge us with a set of markers that are set higher for ourselves than for others. This critic fills the mind with negative

talk, inferiority complexes, low self-esteem, and a lack of drive to succeed. If this critic exists inside you, it must be silenced. You do not deserve to be spoken to in such a manner, even if – and especially if – it comes from within you.

Talk back to this critic. Refute and reject negative thoughts that cross your mind. Speak positively to yourself. Tell yourself that you are wonderful and deserve wonderful things, that you are talented, and that you will achieve your goals. Tell yourself that you are valuable and beautiful, and that you can accomplish whatever you put your mind to. The critic inside you will wither away and will no longer hold sway over your heart or mind. You will be in control. You will triumph.

Your subconscious mind happens to be one of the greatest liars in existence. It can so easily succumb to the whispers of Satan because Satan wants you to be depressed and to think negatively about yourself. He wants to tell you that you cannot accomplish your goals. As long as you are depressed, anxious, or fearful, you are distracted from your worship and love of Allah (ﷻ). This is because you are focused on the issue that is causing your suffering. This is Satan's aim. There is only so much devotion we can offer to our Lord (Who is truly merciful) when we are not in a positive mental state – when we are not happy. Hence, it is important to learn how to conquer Satan and his whispers.

Allah has given us a unique and simple method of resisting these negative messages from Satan; He advises us:

﴿وَأِمَّا يَنْزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ نَزْغٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

(سورة الأعراف: الآية ٢٠٠)

﴿And if an evil suggestion comes to you from Satan, then seek refuge in Allah. Indeed, He is Hearing and Knowing.﴾

(Qur'an 7: 200)



Therefore, it becomes vital to focus on Allah when negative emotions or thoughts consume the mind. Uttering 'lâ ilâha illâ Allâh' has an enormous amount of power to calm the heart and the mind. Ask Allah for protection from Satan's whisperings. Feel the tranquillity descend upon you. Feel the strength of your mind taking control of your thoughts. Breathe in *subhân Allâh* (glory be to Allah). Breathe out negativity.

Tell yourself something like, "I can do anything I choose," and repeat it before you go to bed, before you begin a task, and randomly throughout the day; most importantly, have faith in it. This kind of self-talk has the power to instil confidence in you and take you to heights of your choosing. (See Appendix A: Self-supportive statements.)

What may seem like a trivial negative thought fleetingly crossing your mind has the power to build up and become a sizeable negative. Root these little negatives out of your thoughts and out of your daily self-talk. Assert to yourself that things are going to work out well, that good things will occur, and that you will accomplish your aims. Know, of course, that positive self-talk must come with the corresponding action to accomplish your goals. By talking up good results, however, you invoke the law of positive effects, and good results occur. This is self-confidence in action, from within.

Believe in yourself. Have faith in your abilities. Tell yourself you will succeed. Imbue your inner self with positivity. With self-confidence, you can make anything happen.

### Faith in Allah develops faith in self

Self-confidence equates to having faith in yourself and in your abilities. Faith in yourself can be developed through faith in Allah. A strong faith in Allah consists of a deep trust that He

is in control of all affairs, that He knows what is best for you and will give you what is best, and that He will guide you and support you in your efforts. With this trust comes the belief and confidence that you will succeed. Allah, being the greatest and most powerful, is ultimately the only One Who can control events and their outcomes.

This is not to say that we do not have the free will to make choices and to control situations in our lives. We certainly do, but ultimately, Allah has the control. Thus, He is the only one worthy of your fear. Fear is one of the emotions that can prevent confidence from thriving. Nervousness is partly a result of fear – fear of failure or fear of what people will think of you. However, Allah explains:

﴿إِنَّمَا ذَلِكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ يُخَوِّفُ أَوْلِيَاءَهُ فَلَا تَخَافُوهُمْ وَخَافُوا مِنِّي إِن كُنتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

(سورة آل عمران: الآية ١٧٥)



«That is only Satan who frightens [you] of his supporters. So fear them not, but fear Me if you are [indeed] believers.» (Qur'an 3: 175)

This is poignant; you must not forget this when working to increase your self-confidence. Since Satan and others do not deserve to be feared, there is no point in being afraid. Satan would certainly like you to fear others, but Allah is most rightly feared, for He is the only one with ultimate power; He has full knowledge of everything.

The story of the Prophet's migration to Madinah with his close friend Abu Bakr contains an important lesson regarding trust, fear and hope in Allah. The two men were being hunted by the *Quraysh* (the dominant tribe in Makkah at the time, whose society was based on polytheism), so they hid in a cave after leaving Makkah. Men sent by the Quraysh came so close to this cave that their feet could be seen, and Abu Bakr became nervous. The Prophet (ﷺ) quoted the following verse to calm him:



﴿... لَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَنَا ...﴾ (سورة توبة: الآية ٤٠)

﴿...Do not grieve; indeed Allah is with us...﴾ (Qur'an 9: 40)

The meaning of this is that Allah was with them through His absolute sight, hearing and knowledge; this understanding brings calmness to the heart. It is an amazing counterweight to fear, nervousness, and a lack of self-confidence. Having faith that Allah is with you can give you the strength to follow your dreams and to accomplish your goals. Always remember: Allah is with you, and Allah is supporting you.

A further necessary realization that is a part of faith in Allah is that true worth and value are found in His opinion, not in the opinion of human beings. His is the good opinion that you must strive for. Human beings are fickle, and their views change. You need to have a high opinion of yourself, love yourself, and seek a high opinion from Allah. Knowing this takes away the apprehension or fear that comes from worrying about what others think about you, and it gives you the strength to continue on your chosen path.

Additionally, Allah (ﷻ) mentions:

﴿... وَإِنْ يُرِدْكَ بِخَيْرٍ فَلَا رَادَّ لِفَضْلِهِ ...﴾ (سورة يونس: الآية ١٠٧)

﴿...if He intends good for you, then there is no repeller of His bounty...﴾ (Qur'an 10: 107)

There is no reason to believe otherwise. This is true faith, which gives you faith in yourself. Allah does intend good for you, and you can make it happen. Use your faith as power to achieve what you desire. Allah is with you. Allah is supporting you. Believe this to your core. Believe it, and you will believe in yourself.

### A peaceful mind and heart generate power

A prerequisite to self-confidence is a peaceful mind; when your mind is at ease, you can focus and draw on your mental power. Another prerequisite is a relaxed heart. In order to be confident, the heart must know peace and solace. This is the calmness of the nerves that is a part of confidence. When your heart is steady and serene, your inner strength is multiplied, and your confidence shoots up.

﴿... أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ ﴾ (سورة الرعد: الآية ٢٨)

﴿...Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.﴾ (Qur'an 13: 28)

Given here is a method to bring peace to your heart and to your mind. Remembering Allah at all times, particularly at times when confidence is needed, will help you relax and generate confidence. This type of restfulness is exhibited in relaxation, taking things lightly, being unperturbed, and not getting upset over little things. Even laughing at yourself is an effect of having a peaceful heart; you must be able to do so. If you can practice peacefulness this way, you will be able to accomplish your aims. This essential attitude of peacefulness will give you the base on which to build self-confidence.

It was narrated by Abu Ya'la Shaddad ibn 'Aws (رضي الله عنه) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Verily, Allah has prescribed proficiency in all things.» (Muslim)

Therefore, strive to do your best. Trust Allah and fear Him alone; believe truly that He will give you what is best for you and support you. You can, with Allah's help and your faith, create your own inner power that you can draw on at any time.



### The pitfalls of low self-confidence

Low self-confidence affects your thinking, your feelings, your behaviour, and your body. It makes it hard to get things done, it makes it difficult to succeed, and it affects your attitude and behaviour, particularly in social situations. Nervousness and shyness can result from a lack of self-confidence. Self-confidence is very much an attitude exuded by your body and your presence.

Low self-confidence can result from a sense of inferiority, which interferes with the attainment of hopes and dreams and with your ability to succeed. You must know that inferiority does not exist. We are all equally valuable; there is nothing about you that makes you less than any other person. Knowing this is your strength and your confidence.

Life's experiences can often create personal issues, such as a lack of self-esteem, that erode confidence. Take Sarah, for example. She is a beautiful, intelligent, strong, and confident young woman who is studying to be an architect. However, her path to where she is today – her road to confidence – was not an easy one. She was raised by a woman who criticized her at every turn. There was no father in her life, so she had only the insults and negativity of her mother to 'inspire' her. As she moved into adulthood and began making decisions about her life, she was faced with her mother calling her names and telling her that she was not capable of succeeding at the things she wanted to do. She had literally no support. As a result, she did not attempt to better herself; she held only a menial job that she hated. However, against this negative climate, Sarah decided that she did not want to live such a life. She wanted to fulfil her dreams. She chose to believe in herself and stop believing her mother. She moved into a place of her own to get away from her mother's constant harassment; she found a job to support herself, and she enrolled in college to pursue a career in architecture. She is making it work. She is succeeding, and she is confident in herself.

Her story shows how low self-confidence can cause people to live depressed and boring lives, and how it prevents them from trying to better themselves and accomplish their goals. Her story highlights the power of belief in the self and the power of inner strength and motivation.

### Practical steps to build confidence

In order to build self-confidence, you must put into practice the philosophy that we discussed previously. There are a number of practical steps that you can implement to help you feel confident in yourself. These steps are divided into two categories: mental exercises and physical exercises.

Confidence is, to a large extent, a mental exercise. Implementing the following steps will aid you in your quest towards a more confident you:

- Trust the obvious.
- Utilize your willpower. This is where your courage and strength come from.
- Supplicate to Allah (ﷻ). He will strengthen your resolve and your heart according to your supplication. Allah is your helper.
- Do not put yourself down – ever. Be positive about yourself. You are worth it.
- Be comfortable with yourself. There should not be any ifs (as in "If only I had...").
- Create a mental picture of yourself succeeding.
- Whenever a negative thought comes to mind, voice a positive thought to cancel it out.
- Do not create obstacles in your head; minimize them.



- Do not be mesmerized by others or try to copy them. Only you can be you.
- Repeat positive words of encouragement to yourself every day.
- Try to learn the origin of any negative feelings that you might have towards yourself. Psychoanalyse yourself, because self-knowledge can lead to ridding yourself of self-doubt.
- Make an accurate estimate of your abilities, and then multiply that by ten – this should be your level of self-respect.
- Believe in the talents given to you by Allah.
- Believe that Allah is with you and that He will aid you in your endeavours.
- Learn from your mistakes and improve yourself as a result of them, then forget them.
- Laugh at yourself.
- Stop any self-blame. Kicking yourself for past deficiencies only fuels that internal doubtful voice. Use your encouraging voice instead.
- Love your body.

Confidence also has a physical aspect, so:

- Dress up for yourself. Look good for yourself and no one else.
- Take time to rejuvenate yourself. (This could be by drinking tea, reading, taking a walk, or meditating.)
- Act confident and you will become confident.
- Sit down with a piece of paper and make a list of your strengths. These can be used for positive reinforcement.
- Flexibility and confidence go hand-in-hand, so be willing to take a detour to get to where you want to go.
- Be kind to yourself both physically and mentally.

- For one week, keep a diary in which you write down only positive things.
- Every day, pay someone a compliment. You might be surprised at how good this makes you feel.

People generally take you at your own estimation; therefore, it is vital to have a high opinion of yourself and to be confident. Your levels of confidence may vary among different areas of your life; you can be extremely confident in one area and lack confidence in another. However, having a confident persona can help you replace a lack of confidence with acceptance and self-assurance.

Accomplishing things builds confidence. The more you practice, the better you get, and the stronger your confidence becomes. Hence, you should always try and try again.

Confidence has a way of spreading – for instance, from having specific skills to a general feeling that you can learn new skills and achieve whatever you put your mind to. You can make your dreams come true; moreover, you deserve to have your dreams come true.

## DETERMINATION: ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

With confidence comes determination, or the drive to accomplish your goals. It is the burning enthusiasm that gives you the strength to move forward and seek what makes you happy. It is the energy with which you can succeed. Determination can overcome seemingly insurmountable barriers.

### Have strength in your convictions

Having strength in your convictions generates momentum for you to move forward and achieve your goals. This is the inner



strength that is behind your determination, the base for directing your energy to accomplish tasks, the underlying attitude that will make things happen. If you believe it will happen, you will make it happen.

The positive philosophy of "I don't believe in defeat" can produce determination. It is a philosophy of conviction. In fact, most obstacles to success are mental in nature. Even if they do happen to be real, your attitude towards them is mental. Through strength in your conviction, you build determination, and obstacles fall away. The mental attitude of positivity and strength will lead you to fulfilment.

### Allah's help is near

You cannot have determination without believing that Allah (ﷻ) is with you and supporting you in your endeavours. With the help of Allah, you can accomplish anything you put your mind to, and truly His help is near. Allah advises us:

﴿وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: الآية ٤٥)

«Seek help through patience and prayer...» (Qur'an 2: 45)

Allah is the source of all strength and energy. You can boost your determination by relying on that source, believing in Him and trusting in His decree.

Personal self-talk can increase your faith and hope in Allah. This is where you can make positive declarations to yourself, such as, "I believe Allah will always make a way even when there is no way." Repeat this, and you **will** believe it and you **will** make it happen. Allah's help is near.

### Prayer is a source of determination

There is strength to be gained from supplication. Allah is the One Who answers prayers, as He explains:

﴿... فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: الآية ١٨٦)

(سورة البقرة: الآية ١٨٦)

«...I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me...» (Qur'an 2: 186)

Through prayer, you can be filled with determination. Knowing that Allah answers prayers and is the source of help gives you fortitude. Your willpower is enhanced, and you gain courage. With determination via prayer also comes tranquillity, peace of mind, and joyfulness because you feel close to Allah; that nearness brings calmness and resolve. Focus on prayer and achieve what you want. Draw on the power of prayer. Relax and centre your heart and mind on prayer. This is the way to fulfilling your ambitions.

### You make the choice to succeed

It was narrated by Abu Mâlik al-Hârith ibn 'Âsim al-'Ash'ari (رضي الله عنه) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Everyone starts his day and is a vendor of his soul, either freeing it or bringing about its ruin.» (Muslim)

When you wake up in the morning, choose to free your soul, to be happy and to succeed. Look beyond barriers, and do not be a slave to the moment. See and feel the potential that you have. Make things happen. Write your own history.

Choosing success means overcoming roadblocks. These can be in the form of emotions that get in the way of your inner strength and determination, so free yourself from negative emotions such



as worry and fear. Fear, in general, is not a beneficial emotion. Fear of what others think can hamper your sense of confidence and your drive to achieve your goals. The only fear that is warranted is the fear of Allah. 'Abdullâh ibn 'Abbâs (رضي الله عنه) narrated:

«One day I was behind the Prophet (ﷺ) (riding the same mount) and he said to me: Young man, I shall teach you some words (of advice): Be mindful of Allah, and Allah will protect you. Be mindful of Allah, and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, ask Allah; if you seek help, seek Allah's help. Know that if the nations were to gather to benefit you with anything, they would benefit you only with something that Allah had already prescribed for you; if they were to gather to harm you with anything, they would harm you only with something Allah had already prescribed for you. The pens have been lifted, and the pages have dried.» (A good and sound hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

This illustrates that you should fear no one but Allah. He is in control of all that happens, and He is the only One Who can aid you in all your endeavours. You can feel secure in the knowledge that nothing will happen unless it has already been decreed to happen. When you free yourself of negative emotions, including fear, you will find the determination to make things happen. When emotions overwhelm your soul, your concentration lessens, and your mental capacity, including your memory, diminishes. This is the danger in letting emotions get in the way of accomplishing your aims and in the way of choosing a positive path. You can choose to overpower negative emotions with your determination.

When seeking to accomplish your goals, start with the easier ones, in order to build your self-confidence. Your targets should be defined and measurable.

For instance, if you want to start your own business, begin with research. Your first goal should be to research what it takes to start your own business, in terms of demographics or other

issues related to your business idea. Next, make a goal to write a business plan, and so on and so forth. By breaking your ultimate objective into smaller goals that can be measured, you are making your goal more doable and pumping yourself up with confidence along the way.

If you have multiple goals, be sure to specify them so that you can measure your success. You may need to consider what your motivation is. In other words, are you reward-based or are you dependent on others to motivate you? If you are reward-based, always attach a reward to your goal. If you need someone to look over your shoulder and motivate you, ask a friend to play that role. Along the way, you must recognize when you are using excuses to prevent you from fulfilling a goal. In that case, you must stop the excuses, or you will never accomplish anything.

Realize that you will most likely hit a brick wall at some point in your quest. If you are not careful, it could be your quitting point. Don't let that happen. Figure out what you need to do to get over it, and let your determination push you past it.

### Assert your needs

Determination means asserting your needs and desires. Don't feel as if you do not deserve to have your needs or desires met – you do. Assertiveness is based on the idea that your needs, desires, and feelings are neither more nor less important than those of other people. The alternative to assertiveness is either passivity or aggression, neither of which is helpful in fulfilling your needs or achieving your aims.

Assertiveness is an **attitude** of fairness to yourself and to others. It is claiming your rights. It creates flexibility.

Assertiveness is making claims appropriately, honestly and clearly. It builds the strength that you need to stand up for yourself,



and standing up for yourself is a necessary aspect of determination. If you are working on your goals, and someone asks you to do something that would divert you, have the strength to say no. Give yourself permission to say no, because you must do what you need to do.

Shaykh 'Ā'idh al-Qarni said, "A true trust in Allah (ﷻ) requires striving and working, and only then leaving the results to Allah."<sup>6</sup>

Strive to meet your goals and assert your needs along the way; work hard, knowing that you can thrive; trust Allah (ﷻ) to help you and bring about the best result. Never stop trying. Never say, "I can't." You can. Have strength in your convictions, and choose to succeed. Seize what you want from life. There is nothing stopping you. Believe in Allah and trust His help, His plan, His knowledge, and His mercy.

With determination, you will achieve your goals and dreams. You will succeed in all that you decide to do. You will find fulfilment in this and happiness in your soul.

Oprah Winfrey put it poignantly in the July 2002 issue of *O, The Oprah Magazine*, when she said, "The biggest adventure you can take is to live the life of your dreams."

### THE ART OF SELF-OBSERVATION

Everyone has a unique personality; you are shaped by the way you grew up and the behaviours you learned. These experiences affect the way you behave as well as the way you deal with problems. Problem-solving and behaviour are tested in daily life, and it is critical to keep reactions and instinctive behaviour in check in order to avoid angering Allah.

Self-observation is an important and useful tool for keeping behaviour and actions in line with what Allah loves. It is also very useful in being able to understand yourself: your feelings, why you do the things you do, what makes you tick, and what rejuvenates you. By self-observation, we mean taking account of yourself, focusing your attention inward, and becoming aware of your thoughts and feelings, as well as looking at yourself to recognize negative tendencies, habits, or instinctual reactions. These may include personality traits, behaviours learned from your parents or other influential adults or children in your childhood, and hormonal changes in your body that can affect mood and temperament. Self-observation can also be utilized on the spiritual level to ascertain strengths and weaknesses, so that your strengths can be developed and your weaknesses can be recognized and addressed (since no one is perfect, after all).

The art of self-observation is a means of building a working relationship with yourself. This can make habits less automatic and can open the door to positive change. Putting the focus on the self and instituting change within the self can have a positive effect by influencing those around you to change in positive ways as well. This can broaden and enrich relationships in your life.

Part of self-observation is to look at your behaviour through the eyes of compassion. Do not hate yourself because you have habits that you dislike. Moving beyond them requires understanding these habits and their root causes. Having compassion for the forces that moulded your behaviour is a means of ending any previous self-destructive tendencies. This is the way to know happiness.

Strengths, weaknesses, addictions, and habit patterns can be uncovered by self-observation. Your limitations, once recognized, can be accepted. True satisfaction comes from your inner self; external sources of satisfaction are fleeting. Realize that you cannot



build anything on a weak foundation and that you must deal with core issues. This is self-observation.

In this chapter we will look, *inshallah* (Allah willing), at five areas that tend to have significant effects on our behaviour, habits, and feelings. These areas are personality, background, spirituality, hormonal cycles, and feelings and emotions.

Becoming adept at self-observation in these areas can increase awareness of self-defeating behaviours and help promote understanding and change within the self. This can start the cycle of positive change in your life and the lives of those around you.

### Personality

Your personality is an essential component of the self. It is a foundation upon which you base relationships, behaviour, and a sense of self. Personality is defined in *The American Heritage Dictionary* as "the pattern of collective character, behavioural, temperamental, emotional, and mental traits of an individual." Thus, personality includes not only your ways of thinking and feeling but also your behavioural tendencies.

We also notice that this definition includes character as part of personality. Character deals with the part of personality that is external. It is made up of the attributes, abilities, features, and moral and ethical traits of an individual.

«'Â'ishah (ﷺ) said that the character of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was the Qur'an.» (Muslim)

This is the highest example of character that we have and the model we should strive for. The Prophet's character comprised his manners, attributes, moral traits and ways of dealing with people. Ultimately, we should strive to make our character in line with the Qur'an and to make our manners and behaviour gentle and inviting to others.

One's personality, even in terms of thoughts and emotions, needs to be in line with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) as much as possible. This includes embodying such qualities as being forgiving, patient and soft-spoken.

The difference between the inner traits of a person's personality and the outer traits (their character) can be seen in the example of two people: one is shy and the other is very outgoing, yet both have excellent character; they have both embodied and acted upon the example of the Prophet (ﷺ) with respect to their good manners and behaviour.

Personality has two distinct parts – what is ingrained by Allah (ﷻ) and what is learned. For example, a woman grows up seeing her mother as the head of the household, with her father doing whatever her mother tells him to do. She learns to be the same way in her marriage. The things she may have picked up, such as bossiness or nagging, are aspects of her personality that have been learned. (An important note here is that what has been learned can be unlearned.)

As for that part of the personality that is bestowed by Allah, we can see this developing when we look at babies; as they grow older, their personality develops with them. Some babies are impatient and want their food immediately or do not tolerate people playing with them; others are very calm and are comfortable with whoever plays with them or gives them food. Some babies cling to their mothers, while others are receptive to smiles, even from strangers. Our personality is also affected by birth order – meaning whether you are the first-born, the second-born, the third-born, and so forth, by Allah's will. The differences can be very dramatic between an only child (who is used to having all the attention and may become a high-achiever to please his or her parents) and a fifth child (who is used to sharing the attention of his or her parents and to being babied by older siblings).



In order to work with the part of your personality that can be unlearned, and to make traits and habits that seem automatic become less automatic, you first need to decipher your personality. You need to self-observe.

It has been reported that Jesus (ﷺ) said, "Do not look at people's faults as if you are lords, but look at your own faults as if you are slaves."<sup>7</sup> He was, in fact, teaching the art of self-observation. Recognizing your own faults can aid in fixing them. Do not forget, however, that you are doing this for the purpose of changing any negative traits you no longer wish to possess. You must not become overwhelmed by inspecting your own faults. We all have them. Keep in mind that this is meant to be the first step to positive change, not a door to self-loathing.

It has also been reported that the early Muslims would constantly search their souls to develop within themselves the characteristics of the believers, which Allah describes to us:

﴿قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ۝ ١ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ ۝ ٢ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ ۝ ٣ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِلزَّكَاةِ فَاعِلُونَ ۝ ٤ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِفُرُوجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ ۝ ٥ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مَلُومِينَ ۝ ٦ فَمَنْ ابْتَغَىٰ وَرَاءَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ ۝ ٧ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ ۝ ٨ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَوَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ ۝ ٩ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْوَارِثُونَ ۝ ١٠ الَّذِينَ يَرِثُونَ الْفِرْدَوْسَ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ۝ ١١﴾  
(سورة مؤمنون: الآية ١-١١)

«Certainly will the believers have succeeded. They who are during their prayer humbly submissive, they who turn away from ill speech, they who are observant of *zakâh* [poor due], they who guard their private parts except from their wives or those their right hands possess, for indeed they will not be blamed – but whoever seeks

beyond that, then those are the transgressors – they who are to their trusts and promises attentive, and they who carefully maintain their prayers – those are the inheritors who will inherit the highest part of paradise. They will abide therein eternally.» (Qur'an 23: 1-11)

Striving to make these characteristics automatic for you, to make them a part of yourself so they become part of your personality, is essential; this can be done with the help of self-observation.

Now, let us look at different types of personalities. For the sake of brevity, we will only summarise a little of the large store of information available about personality types;<sup>8</sup> we will focus on the Myers-Briggs personality system, which is based on Carl Jung's theory of psychological types. There are other systems as well, such as Freud's character types, which are based on child development, and Horney's character types, which are based on interpersonal orientations. However, these other systems are not as concise and simple to apply.

The Myers-Briggs system is based upon the idea that people display certain preferences, or inborn tendencies to act or think in a certain way, which make up their personality. These preferences can be broken up into four sets of opposites.

1) Extroverted (E) versus Introverted (I): the way in which a person gets energy.

- **Extroverts** tend to display the following characteristics: they seek interaction, enjoy groups and discussions and like to think out loud, are very outgoing, like variety and action, are talkative, act first and think later, focus outwardly and expend energy, and are invigorated by interacting with the outside world.
- **Introverts** tend to display the opposite characteristics: they like to be alone, enjoy one-on-one time, and focus inwardly; are quiet and reserved; conserve energy; think first and speak



later; enjoy thinking and reflecting; are private; and revitalize themselves by being alone.

2) Sensing (S) versus Intuitive (N): the way in which a person gathers information.

- **Sensors** display the following characteristics: they are pragmatic and realistic; they pay attention to facts and figures; they interpret things literally; they are good observers; they like hands-on projects; they are interested in what is actual; they pay attention to specifics; they focus on the present; they trust their past experiences and tend to want things to remain as they are; and they tend to take in information through sensory awareness: what they can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell.
  - **Intuitives** display the opposite characteristics: they have difficulty focusing on the present, focusing on the future instead; they speculate on many ideas at once; they prefer insights and abstract information; they focus on the big picture; they are imaginative; they value innovation and like to try new things; they trust hunches; and they prefer to consider what might be instead of what is.
- 3) Thinking (T) versus Feeling (F): the manner in which a person makes decisions.
- **Thinkers** tend to display the following characteristics: they are firm-minded and direct; they value justice and fairness; they are objective, value consistency, and are convinced by logic; they value competence and decide with their heads; they are good at critiquing and do not take things personally; and they analyse problems.
  - **Feelers** tend to display the opposite characteristics: they are gentle-hearted, sympathetic, and tactful; they value

relationships; they are subjective and convinced by values; they decide with their heart and value harmony; they are appreciative; they take things personally; and they place value on how others will be affected by their choices.

4) Judging (J) versus Perceiving (P): the lifestyle orientation of a person.

- **Judgers** tend to display the following characteristics: they seek closure and like to complete a project before starting a new one, they finish work before playing, they plan ahead, they are goal-oriented, they like things settled and decided, and they prefer a structured and orderly lifestyle.
- **Perceivers** tend to display the opposite characteristics: they are easygoing, like spontaneity, like to start projects, and are process-oriented; they seek openness and adapt as they go; they play first and work later; and they are flexible in that they like to keep their options open and don't like to be tied down with plans or schedules.

Every individual will tend towards one out of each of the sets of preferences. A person, for instance, who tends towards Extroversion (E) as their energy source, Sensing (S) for information gathering, Thinking (T) as a means of deciding, and Judging (J) as their lifestyle orientation, would be labelled 'ESTJ'. The preferences can be put together into sixteen different combinations.

You can try to determine your own preferences, giving yourself a little insight into your own personality.

Each of the various systems for personality typology is useful in its own right, and each brings unique insights. Acknowledging and understanding your inner states gives you the power to move beyond them. Utilizing these tools of personality typology can give you the means to do so.



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Looking into personality types helps in learning not only about yourself but also about those around you. Look back at the descriptions of the different personality preferences and try to determine the types of your family members, friends, or spouse. This can help you to understand their motivations and how they see themselves. In other words, instead of analyzing them from your point of view, you can learn about them from their own point of view.

Let us look at Janice, whose husband Leo is spontaneous and rarely makes plans. He often goes out with his friends without telling Janice ahead of time; he is known for changing plans and whisking her away on a trip with just a few hours' notice. In contrast, Janice is not a spontaneous person. She likes to plan her events in advance and to organise her schedule. Leo's behaviour is often disturbing to her. If Janice reviewed the personality preferences listed above, she would realize that Leo is a clear Perceiver, while she is a clear Judger. With this new understanding of how Leo's lifestyle preference blends with his decision-making, she could try to appreciate these differences between them and look for ways to make his personality traits work for her. She might start anticipating random activities or keeping track of the times when Leo typically hangs out with his friends, so she could plan with that in mind.

Broadening your understanding of others essentially gives you the ability to expand and enrich your relationships with them. This is especially true in the marital sense, where you interact on a personal and intimate level with your spouse. Understanding him or her better can bring harmony to the relationship. You can then appreciate each other more and appreciate the differences you may have. This translates into a smoother and more peaceful relationship and increases your ability to work well together.

This style of learning about others, of course, goes beyond the spouse. It can be used to better your relationships with your friends, family members, neighbours, or co-workers.

## Background

Each of us has a unique set of experiences that has shaped our personalities, our inner ways of thinking and feeling, and our behavioural tendencies. This is what we refer to as background.

Much of how we behave, think, and feel is learned in childhood from parents, teachers, other influential adults, or other children. Our ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving were either specifically taught to us, by our parents or other adults, or were adopted because that is how the adults around us behaved, thought, or felt.

Of course, most of us had parents who tried to teach us good behaviour and instil in us what they considered to be the best ways of thinking and feeling, yet what we have picked up from them (or from others) may not necessarily be good. For example, a girl grows up with a mother who is very passive and never stands up for herself, no matter how badly her husband treats her. This daughter, although not a naturally passive person, has learned to be passive, so she behaves in her own marriage in much the same way as her mother did in hers. If this woman was being abused by her husband, her passivity would not be a good thing; she would need to learn to stand up for herself or find the strength to get help.

The point here is that there are many behavioural traits and patterns of thinking and feeling that are learned, and some of these are negative traits. The good news is that, as mentioned before, what was learned can be unlearned. Through self-observation, you can look inwardly at yourself – your habits, behavioural traits, patterns of thinking and feeling – to recognize them for what they are and to identify their roots.

By focusing inwardly, you can take traits and habits that are often automatic and make them less so. It is a struggle, and hard work is needed, but this is necessary for self-improvement. It is reported that 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (رضي الله عنه) said:



Hold yourselves accountable before you are held accountable, for this makes the recompense easier. Weigh yourselves before you are weighed, and prepare for the Day of Grand Gathering.<sup>9</sup>

What we can learn from this is to inspect ourselves, to look inward, and to repair ourselves before we stand before Allah (ﷻ) to answer for all of our deeds. We must make sure that our behaviour, our habits, and our ways of thinking are pleasing to Allah.

﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَاكِينَ طَيِّبَةً فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ﴾  
(سورة توبة: الآية ٧٢)

«Allah has promised the believing men and believing women gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence; but approval from Allah is greater. It is that which is the great attainment.»

(Qur'an 9: 72)

If you are prone to anger and aggression with people, you need to recognize this trait so that whenever you lean towards those emotions, you can substitute patience, forgiveness and calmness. Anger and aggressiveness are not pleasing to Allah, and such behaviour will not help you on the Day of Resurrection.<sup>10</sup> This is an example of self-observation and taking account of yourself.

It may be that the angry and aggressive tendencies were actually learned from a parent who displayed these negative traits. You can learn more about yourself and why you behave the way you do by looking at your background and at the behaviour of those with whom you grew up. This type of self-observation can be very useful in improving behaviour, especially in making learned habits less automatic.

Take Joe, who grew up with parents who were intoxicated most of the time. When he was only ten years old, he was forced to take responsibility for his younger brother by getting him dressed, taking him to school, and cooking for him. As an adult, Joe cannot help feeling responsible for all manner of things that are not his business. However, Joe has realized the source of his feelings and tries to let matters go rather than worry about things for which he is not responsible. Joe is a work in progress, but taking a close look at your background can help you to uncover the roots of your own negative behaviour traits.

This type of self-observation can also aid in understanding those around you. Perhaps you work with a man who is prone to ranting about anything and everything with which he disagrees, and no one can defuse these angry outbursts or this man's self-righteousness. Then you meet his mother, who raised him by herself. Seemingly a nice woman, his mother is polite until something upsets her, at which point she too sets off on a self-righteous tirade. All becomes clear; the man in question obviously learned his behaviour from his mother. Now you can, at the very least, understand why he behaves as he does. Even better, you can discuss his behaviour with him and hopefully help him realize how undesirable and offensive it can be. This is the power of looking into one's background and upbringing – understanding and positive change.

### Spirituality

Self-observation is not limited to personality and background, to understanding your inner self and what makes you tick. It can also be very useful in deepening spirituality and inner peace.

Each individual has a unique relationship with the Creator. That relationship is his or her own; no one else can interfere with it



or control it. No two people will melt towards or humble themselves before their Lord in the same way. Allah points out:

(سورة الليل: الآية ٤)

﴿إِنَّ سَعْيَكُمْ لَشَتَّى﴾

«Indeed, your efforts are diverse.»

(Qur'an 92: 4)

Spirituality is very personal and unique, uplifting and enriching; it can bring serenity and peace to your heart. This will come to each of us in different ways, though. It does not mean that we can all start worshipping Allah in whatever way we feel works best for us. Unquestionably, we should follow the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (the practice and collected sayings of Prophet Muhammad [ﷺ] that together with the Qur'an forms the basis of Islamic law) to the best of our abilities. However, the last clause may be the key: 'to the best of our abilities'.

We all have different abilities, different strengths and weaknesses. Self-observation can help us to identify them so that we can use this knowledge to improve our relationship with Allah.

Let us look at an example: Karim has a strong propensity to stay away from food. He rarely gets hungry, and he is repulsed by unhealthy, artificial, and processed food. Besides, he is usually so busy that he does not have time to think about food. Karim can benefit from this trait of his by implementing the fast of Prophet David (ﷺ) – that is, fasting every other day.

«'Abdullâh ibn'Amr bin al-'Âṣ (رضي الله عنه) reported: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was informed that I could stand up for (prayer) throughout the night and observe fast every day as long as I lived. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) asked: Is it you who said this?

I said to him: O Messenger of Allah, it is I who said that.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: You are not capable enough to do so. Observe fast and break it; sleep and stand for prayer, and

observe fasting for three days during the month; for every good is multiplied ten times, and this is like fasting forever.

I said: O Messenger of Allah, I am capable of doing more than this.

He (ﷺ) said: Fast one day, and do not fast for the next two days.

I said: O Messenger of Allah, I have the strength to do more than that.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: Fast one day and break it on the other day. That is known as the fasting of David (ﷺ), and that is the best fasting.

I said: I am capable of doing more than this.

Thereupon, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: There is nothing better than this.

('Abdullâh ibn'Amr [رضي الله عنه] said:) Had I accepted the three days (fasting during every month) as the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) had said, it would have been dearer to me than my family and my property.» (Muslim)

Fasting is an excellent way for Karim to gain abundant rewards from Allah. Sahl ibn Sa'd (رضي الله عنه) reported that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said:

«In paradise, there is a gate called ar-Rayyân, through which only the observers of fasting will enter on the Day on Resurrection. No one else will enter along with them. It will be proclaimed: Where are the observers of fasting that they should be admitted into it? When the last of them enters, it will be closed and no one else will enter it.» (Muslim)

Undoubtedly, Karim has weaknesses as well. He can utilize the art of self-observation to focus on his strengths and recognize his weaknesses so he can work on them. In this way, he is working on strengthening his worship and his relationship with Allah. He can make up for his weaknesses by playing on his strengths. No one is perfect. We all have our faults and shortcomings, but there



is no need to become overly depressed or anxious because of your weaknesses.

(سورة مائدة: الآية ٧٤)

﴿... وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴾

﴿...And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.﴾

(Qur'an 5: 74)

We all seek His forgiveness and pleasure. Allah (ﷻ) knows each one of us and what we are capable of. We need to recognize where our strengths lie and do more of what we can do, all the while seeking Allah's forgiveness for what we cannot do.

Looking inwardly, a great way to draw closer to Allah is to figure out the things that rejuvenate you spiritually. Which activities bring not only relaxation but also an opportunity to reflect and ponder the greatness of Allah? Everyone needs these moments. They can be found in prayer, certainly, but beyond that, each of us requires some time to revitalise and renew our souls. Regardless of how extroverted we may be, we need time alone – specifically, time spent in an activity that reminds us of Allah and His awesome power and magnificence. This could be experiencing nature and reflecting on the incredible creation of Allah, soaking up the sun and its warmth that Allah has given to us, or utilizing deep breathing techniques in meditation.

Each of us must discover our strengths and our weaknesses; we must self-observe. This knowledge gives us the ability to strengthen our spirituality and become closer to Allah and to our ultimate desired destination of paradise.

### Hormonal cycles

The fourth aspect of self-observation that we will discuss, specifically in reference to women, is hormonal cycles. Every woman is affected by her hormones, some more than others. Monthly menstrual periods, pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), pregnancy,

post-partum depression, and menopause all have effects on women. Prior to their monthly periods, some women may be affected by mood swings, memory loss, and/or a short temper, whereas others are hardly affected at all. Each woman has a unique reaction to her changing hormones.

Approximately eighty percent of women experience some symptoms of PMS, which is caused by a hormonal imbalance within the body (in particular, by excessive levels of oestrogen and inadequate levels of progesterone). Other factors are a poor diet, unstable blood sugar levels, and vitamin and mineral deficiencies. This illustrates the importance, particularly for women, of keeping our bodies healthy.

Changes in hormones can affect women's emotional, mental, and physical states. The hormonal changes during pregnancy often make women more sensitive, emotional, or moody. Some women, but not all, suffer from post-partum depression after giving birth; the effects may range from getting upset over small things to having no desire to be a mother or even to continue living.

During menopause, the loss of the hormone oestrogen can have physical effects such as fluctuations in body temperature, sleeplessness, or headaches; mental effects like memory loss; and emotional effects such as depression, anxiety, or irritability.

Every woman has her own unique reactions to her changing hormones. Being aware of these reactions can alleviate some of the negative symptoms, especially the emotional effects. With awareness comes the ability to control the changing moods and resulting behaviours.

For instance, Mary begins menstruating during the middle of every month. A week prior to that, she experiences mood swings and shortness of temper. She yells at her children more than usual and is easily annoyed by her husband. Once Mary realized that this was normal behaviour for her at that time, she decided to work to



control her behaviour. She marked this time on her calendar every month, so that she would be aware if she became temperamental during this time, and she began paying attention to the date. With this knowledge, she was able to catch herself when she became angry over small things, brushing them off instead. Gradually, she began implementing this self-awareness strategy monthly, and she has been successful in lessening the stress during what often was a tense time of the month.

During times of heightened hormonal states, if a woman is affected in the way described above, she may want to try to tread softly around others. At any hint of confrontation, she should hold her tongue and avoid a conflict. When dealing with people, she can speak in a lowered tone to calm herself. She can try to avoid situations she knows may be stressful for her. She should find time to relax: spending time in prayer and supplication, drinking some tea, reading a book, or just relishing some quiet time. This can help clear the mind of stress and unnecessary tension.

PMS causes subtle physical and psychological cues that women can learn to identify. Once they identify these cues, they can work to avoid careless behaviour.

Understanding the causes and recognizing the symptoms of PMS is the first victory in the battle to conquer the symptoms. Learning methods of minimizing symptoms comes next in the fight. Diet, exercise, and supplements can all play a part in alleviating unwanted symptoms.

Looking at diet first, there are some changes that you can implement on a regular basis to strengthen general health and minimize PMS symptoms:

- Eat lots of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Eat whole grains – these are complex carbohydrates and contain fibre, which helps in dealing with stress.

- Drink plenty of water.
- Stay away from 'junk food'.
- Eat foods that are natural; avoid anything with additives and artificial ingredients.
- Eliminate processed food.
- Lower salt intake.
- Minimize red meat consumption.
- Reduce sugar consumption.

To keep your body sufficiently hydrated, you should drink two quarts of water daily, beginning one week before you expect your period and continuing one week after it. Lessen your intake of dairy products, because they block the body's absorption of magnesium, an essential mineral. Avoiding caffeine can also have a positive effect on your health and can lessen symptoms of PMS or menopause.

Vitamin and mineral supplements can also aid in strengthening your body and helping it fight the hormonal imbalance. Multivitamin supplements are an all-around good source of the vitamins and minerals the body needs. Specifically, B6, magnesium, and iron can fall to lower levels than desired, so taking these as supplements may help.

The vitamin-B complex reduces stress and water retention; it also increases oxygen flow to female organs. Magnesium alleviates migraines, depression, and backaches. Iron is good for regulating changes in body temperature (such as the hot flashes of menopause); it also helps transport oxygen to blood cells, fights insomnia, and boosts energy levels as well as the immune system.

Vitamin E relieves nervous tension, irritability and depression. Vitamin C boosts the immune system and relieves breast swelling. Acidophilus breaks down the metabolites of oestrogen. Black



currant seed oil, flaxseed oil and primrose oil all supply an essential fatty acid that is important in relieving symptoms and helping with proper glandular function.

Getting these vitamins and minerals, whether naturally from the foods you eat or from supplements, can immensely improve your overall wellbeing and lessen the effects of the wavering hormones.

Along with proper diet, exercise is very important for maintaining good health and lessening symptoms of PMS. Exercise lifts your mood by increasing the endorphins in your body. It alleviates physical symptoms, such as cramping, by getting blood pumping through your body. Exercise increases oxygen levels in the blood; this promotes nutrient absorption and elimination of toxins from the body, and it also helps keep hormone levels stable. Thus, exercise is vital to both physical and emotional wellbeing.

Recognizing the effects of one's hormones during monthly periods, pregnancy, menopause, and after childbirth can give a woman the power she needs to control her behavioural tendencies. Self-observation in this area can aid in controlling behavioural and emotional tendencies, thereby alleviating tensions within relationships.

It may also be prudent to avoid making major decisions during times of hormonal imbalance if possible. Knowing that your emotions are at a heightened level should make you aware that any decision made could be tainted by these emotions. This is illustrated by the advice of the Prophet (ﷺ) regarding divorce:

«It was narrated by 'Abdullâh ibn 'Umar (رضي الله عنه) that, during the lifetime of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ), he had divorced his wife while she was menstruating. 'Umar ibn al-Khattâb (رضي الله عنه) asked Allah's Messenger about that.

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said: Order him (your son) to take her back and keep her until she is clean (finished menstruating), then to wait

until she gets her next period and becomes clean again. After that, if he wishes to keep her, he can do so; if he wishes to divorce her, he can divorce her before having sexual intercourse with her. That is the prescribed period which Allah has fixed for the women meant to be divorced.» (Bukhari)

Although this specifically refers to a man making a decision during his wife's menstrual cycle, it shows that the time of menstruation of a woman is a time of sensitivity in which erroneous decisions can be made. Thus a woman should be equally conscious as well.

It is also valuable for all men who have relationships with women, whether wives, sisters, or mothers, to understand what they go through during this time of the month. If a man knows when a woman in his life is menstruating, he can take extra care to be kind and sensitive towards her.

### **Awareness of feelings and emotions**

A belligerent samurai, an old Japanese tale goes, once challenged a Zen master to explain the concept of heaven and hell. But the monk replied with scorn: You're nothing but a lout – I can't waste my time with the likes of you!

His very honor attacked, the samurai flew into a rage and, pulling his sword from its scabbard, yelled: I could kill you for your impertinence!

That, the monk calmly replied, is hell.

Startled at seeing the truth in what the master pointed out about the fury that had him in its grip, the samurai calmed down, sheathed his sword, and bowed, thanking the monk for the insight.

And that, said the monk, is heaven.<sup>11</sup>



Although this story contains elements of Buddhism, referring to a Zen master and concepts of heaven and hell that are contrary to the Islamic understanding, it conveys a good point. This story illustrates the strength of one's emotions and the effect they can have if attention is not paid to them. The samurai only became aware of his disturbed state when the monk called his emotional response 'hell'. He was caught up in emotion, which prevented him from seeing straight.

Emotional intelligence is being aware of your own feelings as they occur. This is not an easy type of intelligence to acquire. It means stepping outside yourself and being conscious of your behaviour, even as you are feeling strong emotions. It takes self-observation to a different level than simply 'pondering your past'. It involves acknowledging your feelings and understanding that you have a right to them. Just because you have a right to your feelings does not mean that they are necessarily good or correct, though. This is where the examination of your emotions begins.

Emotional intelligence is more than just knowing your own emotions and recognizing feelings as they happen. It is managing these emotions, handling these feelings, and shaking off any irritability or anxiety that may be present. It is motivating yourself. It is recognizing emotions in others and being empathetic towards them. It is handling relationships positively and having social competence and interpersonal effectiveness. These latter skills all stem from awareness. Once you are aware of your emotions at all times, and you are able to manage them, you can be cognizant of other people's emotions and react confidently to them.

With emotional intelligence, you are not prone to fearfulness or worry. You feel positive about yourself, become outgoing and gregarious, adapt well to stress, express your feelings appropriately, reach out to new people, and are comfortable enough with yourself to be playful and spontaneous.

At the heart of emotional intelligence is intrapersonal intelligence, or the ability to understand and communicate positively with yourself. It is the equivalent of interpersonal intelligence, but turned inward. It is the capacity to form an accurate representation of yourself and to use this to operate efficiently in life. This is self-awareness: ongoing attention to your own internal states – not only your moods but also your thoughts about your moods.

The keys to self-knowledge are the ability to access your own feelings and the ability to make distinctions among them and draw upon them to guide your behaviour. To highlight an example of this, let us look at Jacob, a factory manager whose daily life had no brightness. His job was difficult and filled with pressures, causing him so much anxiety that he typically ended his day exhausted and defeated. After work, he would buy snacks and overeat, causing him to be overweight. Knowing that he had more work the next day added to his anxiety. The thought of food made him feel good, though, so he asked himself why. He came up with the following insight: he ate too much in the evenings to escape his feelings of pressure and inadequacy during the day. While snacking, he felt comforted and safe. This understanding was Jacob's first step towards having compassion for himself, and it was his first step towards change.

Examining your emotions and feelings is not always easy. It may revive bad memories or experiences that you do not wish to remember. It may make you aware of your current hormonal condition. It may cause you to regret previous actions. It will cause you to reconsider your actions and your responses to stressful stimuli, and this is exactly its purpose.

It is reported that the early Muslims would strictly analyse their level of piety. They constantly feared Allah (ﷻ) and thus strove to make everything in their life pleasing to Him, setting an example for later generations. Analyse your piety, your fear of Allah, your



actions, your personality, and your emotions – analyse and self-observe. This is the road to recognizing faults and negative habits; this is the road to improving yourself and indirectly improving others.

Studying personality types, in particular, can open the door to understanding others (your spouse, friends, and family members) as they are, minus your own personal judgements. No one is perfect. Accepting others for who they are, forgiving them, and opening the door to understanding can enrich and broaden relationships based upon Allah's love. Self-observation assists in the ultimate goal of pleasing Allah by improving the self and relationships.

﴿مَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكَ ...﴾

(سورة النساء: الآية ٧٩)

«What comes to you of good is from Allah, but what comes to you of evil [O humankind] is from yourself [as a result of your mistakes or sins]...» (Qur'an 4: 79)

Therefore, work to make the self free from sins, disobedience to Allah, and un-Islamic personality traits, so that good will come from Allah in the form of blessings and blessed relationships.

### SELF-IMPROVEMENT: MAKING POSITIVE CHANGES

Observing the self leads to improving the self if necessary. Self-improvement, or changing your own behaviour for the better, is the culmination of all the processes discussed in the previous chapters. It can refer to changing negative or undesirable habits; it can also refer to inner growth that leads to peace within.

Self-improvement can have an effect not only on you (by making you feel better about yourself and closer to Allah) but

also on those around you. When you change, you become a good example for others to follow. Change is often contagious. Change your behaviour and your actions, and others will change as well, inshallah. Perform recommended prayers after the obligatory prayers more often, and you will find other family members and friends doing the same, inshallah. Start with yourself.

One of the early Muslims said, "We used to consider that when our riding animals or wives were disagreeable, that it was because of some sin that we committed."<sup>12</sup> We can learn from this statement that our behaviour, particularly when it is not pleasing to Allah, can affect those around us in a negative way. If we ourselves are disobeying Allah, how can we expect our family or friends not to? Our disobedience can rub off on them and affect relationships in a destructive way, so that their conduct becomes unpleasant as a result of our poor conduct. Therefore, improving our behaviour can lead to others improving their behaviour towards us. When you start the cycle of positive change in your life, using the art of self-observation as a tool, there is a good possibility that others will, inshallah, change for the better as well.

### Change is inevitable

Life is not static, with nothing ever changing. It is a continual process of refinement that gives us the opportunity to see more clearly. Your mind and body grow older every day, and with this comes change. Resistance to change can cause great suffering, preventing you from growing and living life in a more pleasurable way.

The external world is constantly changing. There is an ebb and flow of events in your life. You cannot stop this natural process of development and change. Many events in life are beyond your control. You cannot change them or stop them from happening, but what you can do is change your reactions to them. This may be the



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most powerful thing that you can do to change your experience of life. Instead of seeing matters in a negative light, find their positive aspects. Go with the flow of life and enjoy it. React with a smile and a positive attitude.

Try to improve the way you deal with external forces that are outside your control. All situations are in Allah's hands, and He is in ultimate control of all things. Seek solace in His wisdom and trust; this will give you the base needed to handle life's circumstances.

Dealing with change that you did not initiate can be a challenge. Most people learn to cope with change by developing a particular style of response, each of which has both advantages and disadvantages. Some typical responses are:

- Reading about how to cope in a healthy manner, and seeking knowledge about the benefits and drawbacks of situations. This can be beneficial for the understanding that it can bring; however, it can be disadvantageous if it prevents appropriate actions or responses.
- Going with the flow and behaving as if with a purpose; enjoying the constant movement and seeking contentment. This is rooted in a free spirit and a sense of adventurousness, and it is beneficial via the fun and enjoyment that is always sought and created. It can be detrimental, however, if it overshadows the thoughtfulness and seriousness that is required in many situations.
- Retiring from the struggle and giving up. This reaction is only beneficial when you realize that the struggle is not worth it, but usually this is not a good strategy for dealing with a situation.
- Hiding your head in the sand; in other words, refusing to accept the inevitability of change. This is also not a good strategy, for it usually extends suffering.

- Taking control and making things happen. This very positive style can result in moving things in a direction that is good for you. However, it can lead to difficulty if you do not know how to recognize when something is beyond your control.

Different responses will be warranted in different situations. Even if you have a style that you usually fall back on, you may want to consider the alternatives and reflect upon which of them is best in a given situation. You should accept that change is inevitable, so finding a way to respond to it and deal with it positively can bring you the harmony you need. It is an understanding that must go along with self-improvement; creating your own changes to bring about what you need out of life can be a wonderful way of living a fulfilling existence.

### Optimism

Being optimistic in regard to your life, the changes that inevitably occur, and the changes that you need to create gives you solace and hope. Optimism provides the motivation and enthusiasm needed to address challenges in life, and it is the foundation for making changes to improve yourself.

Believing that good will come about and that you will be successful in your endeavours gives you the strength and determination to make things happen. Know truly that you can do it, and make the changes you need to become healthier, happier, successful, and satisfied. Recognizing that you can change, and being optimistic about it, will propel you forward.

### Spiritual changes

One of the most important areas where you may need to implement positive changes is in regard to your spirituality, because



your relationship with Allah (ﷻ) should come first and foremost in your life. After self-observing and identifying your strengths and weaknesses, you must implement change. Having an optimistic and positive attitude towards change is also necessary.

The ultimate in faith is when you are able to leave your anxieties behind and trust in Allah. He will take care of everything, so do what you can and leave the rest to Him. Events that are out of your control are not worth agonizing over. Believing this relaxes your heart and brings ultimate happiness.

From this attitude and this faith, you derive your strength, your motivation, and your determination to change, to live life to its fullest, and to thrive. This is the level of spirituality you need to strive for; this is where happiness lies. With this sense of spirituality, you can accomplish the change you need.

When you are trying to improve yourself spiritually, you must know that Allah is merciful, loving and forgiving. Realistically, you can do your best, but you will never be perfect, and you should not beat yourself up for that. You must play on your strengths – and everyone has strengths – to do your best. Allah knows your strengths and your weaknesses, since He created you with them. Embrace the good in that. Don't sweat the small stuff. Allah knows what you are capable of. He knows your heart and your intentions. Feel His love and His power in your life. Know that you have been chosen and blessed with your guidance to Islam, and that Allah will support you as long as you believe. He will be there for you, so be there for Him, to the best of your ability, by following His injunctions. Seek nearness to Him through your worship.

Self-improvement in this area is vital to having a cleansed heart and a contented existence. From a practical point of view, what can you do to achieve this level of trust and faith in Allah so that you can put your life completely in His hands? What can you do to gain and increase your faith?

First, be honest with yourself about your faults in relation to practicing Islam, and pick one to work on. Communicate with Allah daily about your intention, and seek His help.

Read the Qur'an on a daily basis. This infuses your heart with conviction and reliance upon Allah.

Focus on your prayers. Make extra prayers. Take time within them to talk to Allah in your native language. Seek nearness to Him through this; He will answer your prayers. He will guide you to the truth. He will forgive your sins if you sincerely seek forgiveness.

Find time for contemplation of the greatness of Allah and His creation. This inspires the heart and fills it with awe.

Fulfil your physical needs so that they do not become a distraction from your worship of Allah. Beware of overdoing it, though, because eating or sleeping too much can lead to sluggishness, obesity, and depression.

Fast on a regular basis. Even if it is just once a week, this strengthens your willpower and brings you closer to Allah. Doing something for His sake and His sake alone creates a potent connection to Allah.

During the month of Ramadan (the sacred month of fasting), focus on improving yourself Islamically, then stick with the changes you make so that they are worthwhile.

Thank Allah in the morning for allowing you to wake up and live another day. Thank Him throughout the day for anything and everything you have. Even life itself is a blessing that Allah has bestowed upon you, so thank Him a great deal.

Ask Allah constantly for forgiveness, uttering throughout the day: *astaghfir Allâh* (I seek Allah's forgiveness).

Use late evenings to reflect on Allah, as well as on the positive aspects of your life, the events of the day, or your goals. Reflection



is crucial to increasing your faith, instilling peace in your heart, and gathering the internal strength to continue and thrive.

Record the Qur'an on an electronic device and listen to it regularly. Even if Arabic is not your native language, you can still feel the rhythms, hear the beauty, and feel the power of the recitation of these words.

Spend some time reading inspirational stories of the Companions. Their lives, particularly the examples of never giving up and staying strong during persecution, can motivate you.

As you make ablution, focus on washing away your sins. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, as narrated by Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه):

«When a bondsman (a Muslim or a believer) washes his face (in the course of ablution), every sin he contemplated with his eyes will be washed away from his face along with the water (or with the last drop of water); when he washes his hands, every sin they wrought will be effaced from his hands with the water (or with the last drop of water); and when he washes his feet, every sin towards which his feet have walked will be washed away with the water (or with the last drop of water), with the result that he comes out pure from all sins.» (Muslim)

Slow down your washing and rub your skin to ensure that your ablution is effective in this way.

Attend Friday congregational prayer regularly (for women, try to attend as often as you can). This can be a source of inspiration and a reminder of the glory of Allah.

Give charity, for this counteracts bad deeds and also leaves you with a wonderful feeling. You are helping yourself as much as others when you give generously.

Finally, print verses of the Qur'an or sayings of the Prophet (ﷺ) and hang them on the walls around your house.<sup>13</sup> This gives you something positive and inspirational to look at every day.

### Strategies for positive change

As you implement positive changes in your life, you must be aware of three conditions necessary for fruitful change: understanding the present, stepping lightly from the past, and accepting the uncertainty of the future. With this understanding in mind, you can make the future what you want it to be and make yourself who you want to be. Throughout this process, you must be kind to yourself – this makes it easier to change.

The most difficult step in making changes is getting started. Begin with small changes. Make manageable and healthy changes that gradually improve your wellbeing. 'Ā'ishah (رضي الله عنها) reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«The deeds most loved by Allah (are those) done regularly, even if they are small.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Some further strategies for implementing needed changes in your life are as follows:

1. Do a 180-degree turn. In other words, given a situation where people would expect you to act in a certain way, do the complete opposite. It may come as a pleasant surprise to them and inspire them to change likewise. If what you have been doing to maintain a peaceful relationship or accomplish a goal is not working, try something different.
2. Act 'as if'. If things in your life are not making you happy, or if you are experiencing a trial, act as if you are happy and as if the trial is not a big deal at all. Acting 'as if' can actually rub off on you, making you feel better; it can also rub off on those around you, bringing harmony to relationships.
3. Do more of what works. If certain actions are helping you to attain your needs, meet your goals and prosper in your relationships, do more of them.



4. Stop talking and act. Sometimes people talk and talk and talk about their needs, but they never take any action to fulfil those needs. What is needed is action to make it happen.
5. Implement problem-solving techniques. First, identify the problem. Second, brainstorm to come up with as many ideas for solutions as possible. Third, take steps towards implementing the changes: select a solution that seems most promising, then try it out, evaluate what happens, and persist until you feel better. Alternatively, try another idea and repeat the process. Some guidelines to bear in mind for problem-solving are: do not waste time on problems that cannot be solved; tackle one problem at a time; and work on changing yourself, not others.

Implementing positive changes can improve and enrich relationships in your life, bringing you inner peace and success. Positive changes should be centred on obeying Allah (ﷻ) and pleasing Him; likewise, our relationships themselves should be centred on love, helping each other in terms of piety, and being open with and accepting of each other.

### **Creative ideas for change**

The following are suggestions for positive actions that can be taken; inshallah, they will have a beneficial effect on you:

- Volunteer in your community.
- Smile. It's contagious – having a positive attitude rubs off on others. This has been proven in a study that concluded, "...mood is catching. Both men and women, exposed to enough smiling faces, felt cheerful."<sup>14</sup>
- Avoid negative people. Stay around positive people instead.
- Become physically active. This keeps you mentally and physically healthy.

- Be conscious of your words. Avoid backbiting.
- Surround yourself with life. Put plants in your home, and create beauty around you.
- Find a hobby that you enjoy. If you do not know what you might enjoy, try different things.
- Step outside your comfort zone. If there is something new that you've been waiting to do, do it. Open your mind to new thoughts and experiences. Allah has a wealth of treasures out there. If you stay in your comfort zone, you will never live fully.
- Listen more and talk less.
- Avoid argumentation. You don't have to win battles with other people; your focus is on winning the battle with yourself.
- Learn how to spend time by yourself. This develops a strong sense of inner self. Take a book to the park or go for a hike in the woods without a companion.
- Take time to appreciate what you have instead of always looking at what you do not have.
- Focus on the positive things you have achieved.
- Find a trusted friend who can be your life coach. This friend should know what you want to accomplish and then should watch over you, encourage you and motivate you.

### **Tips for implementing change with children**

If you have children, you may want your children to change in positive ways as well. There is only one way to do this: lead by example. When you do something, your children will follow. If you are a reader, your children will be readers. If you are a jogger, your children will be joggers. If you want your children to wake up for



the dawn prayer, you must wake up for it yourself. Involve your children in the activities that you want them to practice. They will eventually pick up these new positive habits and begin to practice them by themselves.

Through the aforementioned strategies, you can begin to make positive changes in your life. By making changes, you not only improve yourself, but you become an inspiration and example for those around you. Most importantly, you become confident in yourself and what you can do.

As a Chinese proverb says, "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

### STRESS RELIEF

An essential ingredient for self-fulfilment and inner happiness is stress relief. In order to implement the previous philosophy, there must be physical and mental peace. Stress affects everyone's life, albeit in different ways. Coping with it and releasing it from the mind and body opens the door to clearing your mind so you can focus on more important things. Everything is connected in a big circle; life cannot be fully compartmentalized. Stress and drama will affect everything, so finding a method for dealing with stress is vital.

With the release of stress come clearer thinking, manageable emotions, and inner strength. Relaxation is the key, but it is not always intuitive or natural to a person. Learning how to relax and let stress melt away can be done. Relaxation is more than just a physical skill; it is an attitude of calmness and of taking things in stride. It is a habit that, once formed, is restorative to your system as tension is released.

### Mental release

With the mental release of stress comes inner tranquillity. Most of the stress forms in your mind as a response to conditions in your environment, such as having too much work to do but not enough time, or faltering social interactions.

By choosing the way you think about a situation, you can prevent events from causing you stress. This may be difficult sometimes, but it is very doable. Meditating on a regular basis can help you control your emotions, which allows you to relax mentally and release stress. When you meditate, you focus your mind. You let go of the negative feelings and the thoughts that are causing you grief, and you allow only positive thoughts to enter.

Celebrate silence. Don't take things too seriously, especially if they don't deserve it. Embrace spontaneity. Relax and have fun. You can develop a relaxed mental attitude by adopting a relaxed posture, refusing to rush, seeking out pleasurable activities, creating habits of activities you find relaxing, having back-up plans, and giving yourself breaks from the day-to-day grind. When you adopt these practices, stress tends to affect you much less. Stress relief is very much a mental attitude that is manifested outwardly in the way you carry yourself, behave, and interact with people. With mental relaxation comes physical relaxation as well.

### Physical release

Stress relief also has a physical component, for tension and stress can cause physical pain. This tension may be released through various channels ranging from physical activities, such as racquetball or running, to relaxation through meditation or quiet activities.

The first thing that can help when seeking physical relaxation is an uncluttered environment. Living in an elegant, simple,



uncluttered space can unclutter your mind as well. This generates beauty and permits you to appreciate it and breathe it in. In this kind of space, you can relax both mentally and physically.

What relaxes one person will not necessarily work for another, so it is important to find what works for you. Choose a method of relaxation to try, schedule a time for it, and find a place to relax. The method you choose can be yoga (in terms of stretching exercises, not as a spiritual practice), meditation, prayer, or something else you enjoy and find relaxing. Try to set aside about thirty minutes a day for this because regenerating your mind and body takes time, and you deserve to give it the time it needs.

Physical relaxation can include deep muscular relaxation to release tension from your body. Your body will tell you when you are experiencing too much tension, through aches and pains in the neck, back, or shoulder muscles. Tension can also make you irritable and tired; therefore, finding a way to release it is essential.

To relax your muscles, first clench your fists and then let go. Breathe deeply. Next, tighten your biceps and then let go slowly. Proceed in this manner through all of your muscle groups. Breathe deeply and slowly in between each. This physical release of tension can be done daily.

Meditation is another form of physical release. To begin meditation, you need to first practice proper breathing. Breathe slowly, taking deep breaths that are measured and regular. Focus on your breathing. When you concentrate your whole being on breathing, calmness ensues, and stress melts away. Breathe out worries and breathe in happiness. Imagine relaxing imagery such as calm waters or a river bank. Focus on this peaceful scene, where there are no anxieties to trouble you.

Even the simple act of tuning in to your breathing is considered meditation and is a good way to relieve stress. Take a deep breath and hold it. Tell yourself to let go as you breathe out. Breathe naturally

for awhile and repeat this. Let the stress go. Let the frustration go. Let the anxiety go. You will feel lightened.

Prayer is a form of meditation, a time when you can focus on Allah (ﷻ) instead of the stressors in your life. It should include slow, deep breathing to generate concentration and focus on Allah. He is the source of all peace,<sup>15</sup> so focusing on Him will bring you serenity. Say your supplications within the prayer slowly, and let the words sink into your heart. Understand what you are saying. Let the words bring peace to your heart. Let them fill you with trust, faith, and love of Allah. Allow calmness to flow over you; sense the mercy and power of Allah and feel the stress and anxiety disappear.

﴿...أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ﴾ (سورة الرعد: الآية ٢٨)

«...Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.» (Qur'an 13: 28)

These relaxation exercises can be done regularly. As soon as you notice small degrees of tension or stress, you can implement a relaxation strategy so you can let go of it easily. Shorten the relaxation exercise if you need to practice it often. Practice it in increasingly difficult situations. The more you practice, the easier it becomes, until it becomes second nature.

Some other methods of physical stress relief are:

- Reading books to elevate your consciousness and feed your mind.
- Associating with gentle people.
- Meditation and deep breathing.
- Prayer.
- Anaerobic exercise (short-lasting, high-intensity activities such as weight lifting, jumping rope, or sprinting).



- Aerobic exercise.
- Enjoying simple pleasures.
- Finding a place of stillness and relaxation.
- Writing in a journal.
- Taking a walk in the woods and using the quietness for positive mental talk.
- Connecting to the world outside yourself for rejuvenation.
- Participating in activities that make you feel good.
- Participating in sports.
- Travelling or taking a vacation.
- Changing your normal routine, even if only for an hour.
- Drinking hot tea.

These are by no means all of the physical activities that can help with stress relief. You have to find what works for you personally. Think of activities that give you pleasure, make you laugh, and help you relax. Do these whether they are small or big. Treat yourself to things that make you happy. You deserve to enjoy yourself stress-free, and enjoying yourself will relieve stress.

### Diet

Diet often gets overlooked, yet paying attention to what you put into your body can have a tremendous effect on your physical wellbeing and your ability to release stress. Your body is a gift from Allah (ﷻ) and should be treated with respect and care. It does not deserve to be destroyed through the food you eat. It can be difficult to resist temptation when it comes to food, but to feel good physically and mentally, a healthy body is essential. It was reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«No human ever filled a vessel worse than the stomach. Sufficient for any son of Adam are some morsels to keep his back straight.

But if it must be, then one-third for his food, one-third for his drink, and one-third for his breath.» (A sound hadith recorded by Aḥmad, at-Tirmidhi, an-Nasâ'i, and ibn Mâjah)

This advice is relevant in today's culture of overconsumption. Following this advice keeps your body at an optimal size and in optimal health. It also makes a big difference in how you feel and in your level of energy. When your level of energy is high, you can accomplish many things, including the activities necessary to physically release stress. When your energy is high, you can mentally focus on releasing stress. When your body feels good physically, you are more likely to feel good mentally as well.

The Prophet (ﷺ) also said:

«Take advantage of your health before your sickness...» (A *mursal*<sup>16</sup> hadith recorded by al-Bayhaqi; al-Mundhiri said its chain of narrators is sound)

Before you can take advantage of your health, you must attain good health. This means eating healthful foods that are not tainted by pesticides and unnatural additives. This allows the body to function more smoothly. Some artificial ingredients in foods have been found to be carcinogenic or to come with other side effects. For example, artificial dyes, which often are derived from petroleum, acetone, or coal tars, are known to be carcinogenic; they can cause skin rashes and are said to cause Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Aspartame, an artificial sweetener, is known to cause vision problems, epileptic seizures, headaches and dizziness, memory loss, aggression, nausea, hyperactivity in children, and drowsiness – a long list of side effects for just one additive. Sticking to an all-natural diet and eating foods that were created by Allah to nourish your body can give you the energy and health you deserve; this will help you to thrive, both mentally and physically.



**Peace from faith in Allah**

It was narrated by Abu Yaḥyâ Suhayb ibn Sinân (رضي الله عنه) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Wondrous are the believer's affairs. For him there is good in all his affairs, and this is so only for the believer. When something pleasing happens to him, he is grateful, and that is good for him; and when something displeasing happens to him, he is enduring, and that is good for him.» (Muslim)

Faith in Allah lets you feel at peace with yourself and with your circumstances. It gives you a level of understanding that allows you to brush off little things that might annoy you, and to release stress and anxiety. Faith in Allah is a source of peace and contentment that you might not find otherwise. As your closeness to Allah increases, your heart will strengthen. You will be able to withstand stressful situations with ease and to feel mental as well as physical peace.

﴿مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ قَلْبَهُ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ﴾  
(سورة تغابن الآية ١١)

«No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah. Whoever believes in Allah – He will guide his heart, and Allah is Knowing of all things.»  
(*Qur'an* 64: 11)

This is another true gift from Allah. With a heart that is upon guidance from Allah comes mental relief from the pressures of life. Physical pressures may still exist; however, how you perceive them is fully within your control. With a sound heart comes the ability to view them in a positive light and to feel satisfied with your immediate experience.

Stress relief can be achieved through a plethora of different means. It is essential to feeling good about yourself both mentally

and physically. Through stress relief, you can attain vitality. Vitality is not just physical health; it is an attitude. It is exhibited in sparkling eyes, radiant skin, and an energetic demeanour. Revitalise your life.



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As the saying is, "You are what you eat." If you eat right, you will feel right. If you eat right, you will think right. If you eat right, you will live right. A diet that is rich in vitamins and minerals is a diet that is rich in life.

It is not just what you eat, but how you eat. Eating with grace and gratitude is a way to revitalize your life. It is a way to connect with the food you eat and the people you eat with. It is a way to find joy in the simple things in life.

So, eat right, eat with grace, and eat with gratitude. It is the best way to revitalize your life. It is the best way to find joy in the simple things in life. It is the best way to connect with the food you eat and the people you eat with.

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## FOR RELATIONSHIPS



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In order to create rich and fruitful relationships, you need to implement certain methods of interacting with people as well as specific methods of personal understanding. We are going to focus on close personal relationships, but applying this advice to all your relationships will help them to prosper and be healthy. The first step towards creating healthy relationships is to be healthy yourself. You must be at ease with yourself, love yourself, and be confident in yourself and your abilities. Only then will you be able to love others and find understanding and peace within relationships.

The key is how you use your energy in relationship to yourself and to others. Concentrate on what is important, not what is trivial. Focus on the positive aspects of yourself and those around you. Direct your energy towards seeking peace and understanding others, using it to bring about calmness and joy. Your energy will spread to others, because positive energy begets positive energy. Joy is contagious.

Dealing with those around you requires interpersonal intelligence. This is the ability to understand other people: what motivates them, how they work, and how to work cooperatively with them. With this understanding, your heart will be filled with gentleness towards them. Having compassion towards others generates peace within relationships as well as peace within you, as Allah (ﷻ) affirms:

﴿ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ ۖ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ﴾  
(سورة البلد: الآية ١٧-١٨)



«And then being among those who believed and advised one another to patience and advised one another to compassion. Those are the companions of the right [or the companions of good fortune; that is, those who receive their records in their right hands and proceed to paradise].»  
(*Qur'an* 90: 17-18)

Compassion and interpersonal intelligence guide you in dealing with those around you.

Another key aspect in creating healthy relationships is to accept others for who they are, without trying to change them. Learn to love them with all their quirks and inadequacies, just as you love yourself with all your quirks and inadequacies. Accepting others means acknowledging the facts about them without judgement. Sometimes people can change, but some things are ingrained and are just part of a person's character. Remember that change is something that individuals have to do for themselves – when they desire it. It has to come from within; hence, you should not try to change other people or expect them to be something they are not. You should accept those things that are simply part of a person's character.

You may reach a point, however, when you cannot tolerate certain aspects of a person's personality. You must be able to recognize what you can accept and what you cannot. This is very personal and will affect intimate relationships. No one is perfect, so seeking perfection will get you nowhere. You need to strike a balance between accepting certain behaviour and knowing what you cannot tolerate. Being able to discern this will benefit you greatly.

To have a satisfying relationship, you must be at peace with whatever stage of growth you have reached and with your current circumstances. This does not mean that you have to tolerate unhealthy relationships; on the contrary, you need to recognize unhealthy relationships and then either improve them or move on. This is an extension of being able to recognize whether or not you

can accept certain aspects of a person's character that you do not like. Ultimately, this is part of understanding yourself and your needs. If your needs are not being met within a relationship, then the relationship may not be what you need. Recognizing your own needs and knowing what you can or cannot accept will help you develop healthy relationships, because being at peace within yourself is vital to being at peace within a relationship.

A simple yet profoundly effective method of creating peace, within yourself and with others, is to smile. Smiling is contagious; when you smile, those around you are drawn into your web of happiness, and this produces good feelings amongst people. You feel good, and those around you also feel your positive, joyous aura.

In this section, we are going to focus on just two aspects of relationships. These aspects, however, are so important that if you are able to live by these recommendations, your relationships will flourish.

The first aspect is communication, which is vital to any relationship. When communication is lacking or turns sour, the relationship turns sour, too. It is essential to keep communication positive and non-threatening. Communication means more than just talking; in fact, a large part of it is listening, through which you are able to learn the needs and motivations of others.

The second aspect is forgiveness. This is a means not only of creating peace between people, but also of bringing peace to your own heart. When you have achieved forgiveness and found peace within, you can move on and fill your heart with positive feelings. Forgiveness is the backbone of any good relationship; there will always be things that need to be forgiven since we all make mistakes. The trick is to try your best to understand others and to always forgive them.



**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

Communication is an important tool for nourishing love and affection between spouses and among friends, neighbours, and family members. When used wisely, it can be a powerful source of closeness, happiness and peace. Communication can either mend or ruin relationships, depending on how wisely or unwisely it is used. Failure to communicate is a common explanation when things go awry.

Communication is a blessing from Allah that should be used correctly and wisely. Not everyone has the ability to communicate; thus, you should be thankful to Allah for this blessing. It can be a means for much reward from Allah through remembrance of Allah, reading the Qur'an, speaking good words such as enjoining righteousness and forbidding evil, teaching those without knowledge, and performing other acts of worship. On the other hand, it can earn punishment from Allah through acts of disobedience such as backbiting, slander, cursing, vain talk, obscene or abusive language, praying to others besides Allah, inspiring others to do mischief, and lying.

To make the most of your relationships, you need to look at the means of effective communication. When communication is negative, oppressive and abusive, it is definitely not effective. In contrast, calm, positive and respectful communication, which fosters sympathy, love and compassion, is highly effective.

Referring to husbands and wives, Allah directs us to:

﴿...وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ...﴾ (سورة النساء: الآية ١٩)

﴿...live with them in kindness...﴾ (Qur'an 4: 19)

In his commentary on this verse, Ibn Katheer said that this means "...by saying kind words to them, treating them kindly and making your appearance appealing for them".<sup>17</sup>

Allah enjoins us:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا﴾

(سورة الأحزاب: الآية ٧٠)

﴿O you who have believed, fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice.﴾ (Qur'an 33: 70)

Ibn Katheer explained that this verse means "...to speak in a straightforward manner, with no crookedness or distortion".<sup>18</sup>

Take into consideration that between husbands and wives in particular, telling the cold, hard truth can sometimes have a destructive effect on the romance of the relationship. Size up the situation to determine whether silence may be more beneficial. To ensure peacefulness in the relationship, always use wisdom, tact, thoughtfulness and care when speaking with your spouse.

Fearing Allah in regard to what we say is essential to effective communication, for there are indeed angels ready to record every word we say.

﴿مَا يَلْفِظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ﴾ (سورة ق: الآية ١٨)

﴿He [meaning humankind] does not utter any word except that with him is an observer prepared [to record].﴾ (Qur'an 50: 18)

Keeping this in mind is vital to keeping communication respectful and within the bounds of Islam. This should instil fear of Allah, for there is no escaping the Day of Judgement, when every word we have ever uttered will be presented before us. Allah says:

﴿وَقُلْ لِعِبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَنْزِعُ بَيْنَهُمْ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوًّا مُبِينًا﴾ (سورة الإسراء: الآية ٥٣)



«And tell My servants to say that which is best. Indeed, Satan induces [dissension] among them. Indeed, Satan is ever to humankind a clear enemy.»  
(*Qur'an* 17: 53)

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said:

«Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good or keep silent.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Indeed, it is a weighty matter to communicate in a negative, evil, or oppressive way. If the words that are going to come out of your mouth are not beneficial, then it is better to remain silent. This is especially applicable if you are angry, when it is easy to pronounce words that will count as bad deeds. At such times, keeping quiet can make a huge difference in preventing feelings from being hurt and in preventing your soul from falling into destruction on the Day of Judgement.

To further explain the means of effective communication, what follows is a compilation of dos and don'ts of good and successful communication.

### Dos of Good Communication

- **Respect** – Respect is an essential element of effective communication. Without respect, people feel belittled, worthless and unloved. Respectful communication can increase the chances of working things out or reaching a compromise.
- **Calmness** – Staying calm while communicating can ease tension and smooth the communication process. Calmness can be contagious and can also aid in calming the person with whom you are speaking.
- **Gentleness** – Being gentle can soften the heart of the one with whom you are conversing. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Indeed Allah is gentle and loves gentleness, and He gives due to gentleness what He does not give due to harshness.»  
(Muslim, Ibn Majâh and Ibn Hibbân)

- **Be aware of your own feelings** – In order to communicate your feelings effectively and accurately, you need to be aware of your feelings and have a good understanding of your own self. This enables more accurate communication and opens the door to understanding the other person's feelings.
- **Timing** – Timing is crucial to making communication positive. Choosing times when you are rested, as well as calm and not angry, is a must for avoiding heated confrontations.
- **Non-aggressive body language** – Communication involves more than just words. It includes any means of conveying your thoughts, feelings, or desires to another person. Body language is a potent means of communication. It can include such things as facial expressions, rolling of the eyes, gestures and posture. As they say, actions speak louder than words. Try to make sure that your actions and body language agree with your words. Ensure that your body language is upbeat, gentle and conducive to gaining positive responses.
- **Stay on topic** – When discussing an issue, make sure you stay on that issue only; do not bring up other issues. This is paramount in ensuring that the issue is addressed clearly. It can also help to keep all of the parties from feeling overwhelmed or accused.
- **Accentuate the positive** – Positive communication can be extremely helpful in creating an atmosphere of optimism, compassion, and encouragement. Speaking in positive terms, especially about the people to whom you are talking, makes them feel comfortable and good about themselves.



- **Hope for a positive future** – Looking forward to the future, beyond the issue at hand, with a positive outlook can aid in finding a compromise and facilitating an atmosphere of understanding.

- **Truth** – Speaking the truth is enjoined upon us by Allah; when it comes to communicating your feelings, truth is the only way to have your feelings validated and addressed. With regard to dealing with difficult issues, sticking to the truth without exaggerating will help to bring about a resolution more easily.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Tell the truth, for truth leads to piety, and piety leads to paradise. The person who continues to speak the truth and endeavours to tell the truth is recorded as truthful with Allah. Beware of telling lies, for telling lies leads to impiety, and impiety leads to hellfire. The person who keeps telling lies and endeavours to tell lies is recorded as a liar with Allah.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

- **Listen carefully** – Listening is a crucial talent in effective communication. This means more than just sitting quietly; it involves opening your ears, mind and heart to the other person's words. Communication goes both ways: speaking and listening, listening and speaking.
- **'I' messages** – In order for the other person to feel at ease and not as if he or she is being accused, you should use what is called 'I' language. This means making statements with your own self, instead of the other person, as the frame of reference. For example, you could say, "I feel upset when you come home late," focusing the language on yourself, as opposed to accusatory language like, "You are always late."
- **Proposal language** – Language such as "I propose that..." steers the conversation in a positive and flexible manner. By

giving the other person a chance to negotiate and make his or her ideas known, you make him or her feel respected and cared for.

- **Compromise** – Finding a solution that works for everyone involved makes all parties feel that their opinions and feelings are valued and important. Of course, there may be times when compromise is not possible or is not feasible, as when one of the parties is adamant about an opinion that goes against the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).
- **Empathy** – Showing empathy towards others is a means of understanding them and their experiences. Putting yourself in their shoes and seeing the issue from their point of view is extremely important in being able to understand and forgive.
- **Understand and forgive** – Ultimately, with successful communication, understanding and forgiving in any circumstance are vital for the continued development of love and compassion between the individuals. Freeing the heart of any grudges will help to ensure successful and effective communication in the future as well.

### Don'ts of Good Communication

- **Criticizing and belittling** – Criticizing can be detrimental to effective communication. Belittling a person and insulting them only leads to hurt feelings, which will not produce successful communication. Criticizing is a means of following a person's faults by essentially throwing them in his or her face.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«O hypocrites! Do not harm the Muslims, do not revile them, and do not follow their faults. Verily, whoever follows the faults of his brother Muslim, Allah will follow his faults;



and he whose faults are followed, Allah will disgrace him even inside his dwelling.» (at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Hibbân; the grade for this hadith is acceptable)

- **Blaming** – Blaming should be avoided because it can hurt feelings and make people feel bad about themselves. Many things that happen are not the fault of any specific person; putting the blame on someone will only push them away and distance them from you emotionally. On the contrary, even if someone is at fault, keep in mind that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«...and there is no one who loves to accept an excuse more than Allah...» (Bukhari and Muslim)

- **Using vulgarity** – The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Decency comes from belief, and belief leads to paradise. Vulgarity comes from crudeness, and crudeness leads to hell.» (An authentic hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Hibbân)

- **Name-calling** – Allah (ﷻ) cautions:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِنْ نِسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الْأَسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ﴾ (سورة حجرات: الآية ١١)

«O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each by [offensive] nicknames. Wretched is the name [that is, mention] of disobedience after [one's] faith. And whoever does not repent – then it is those who are the wrongdoers.»

(Qur'an 49: 11)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«The worst people in rank before Allah on the Day of Resurrection are those whom the people desert, or abandon, in order to save themselves from their evil speech.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

- **Using 'you' statements** – The opposite of 'I' statements, 'you' statements are focused on the person to whom you are speaking, and they tend to be accusatory. Accusing others not only hurts them but is also a serious transgression in the sight of Allah if the accusation is not true. Allah warns us:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْذُونَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ بَغَيْرِ مَا اكْتَسَبُوا فَقَدْ احْتَمَلُوا بُهْتَانًا وَإِثْمًا مُبِينًا﴾ (سورة الأحزاب: الآية ٥٨)

«And those who harm believing men and believing women for [something] other than what they have earned [deserved] have certainly borne upon themselves a slander and manifest sin.» (Qur'an 33: 58)

- **Cursing** – This applies to men as well as to women. Cursing causes tensions to rise and hampers positive communication. Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri (رضي الله عنه) said:

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) went out to the prayer ground (for the prayer of one of the *Eids* – the two annual Islamic celebrations, one at the end of Ramadan and the other at the culmination of the Hajj), and he passed by the women and said: O women! Give in charity, for I have been shown that you shall be the majority of the people of the fire.

They asked: Why is that, O Messenger of Allah?

He replied: You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands.» (Bukhari and Muslim)



- **Interrupting** – It is difficult for people to explain their feelings if they are interrupted every time they try. If you do not listen and give them time to explain themselves, you will not be able to understand their feelings or opinions. Interrupting can also be very annoying, possibly causing the other person to become upset. It increases the likelihood of argumentation instead of conversation; it also increases the possibility of having loud voices instead of calm and peaceful tones. Interruptions show disrespect for the point of view of others and also cause them to lose their train of thought and forget what they wanted to express. If an interruption is made impulsively, it is best to apologize and encourage the person to continue.
- **Getting angry** – Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) reported that:  
«A man said to the Prophet (ﷺ): Advise me.  
The Prophet (ﷺ) said: Never get angry.  
The man repeated his request multiple times, and every time the Prophet replied: Never get angry.» (Bukhari)
- **Ignoring** – Ignoring a person who is trying to communicate with you is detrimental to maintaining a stable and compassionate relationship. It is disrespectful and shows that you do not care about the other person's feelings. Hence, it is essential to ascertain whether or not it is a good time to talk in order to (hopefully) avoid any possibility of ignoring someone.
- **Playing games (not dealing with the issue)** – This is disrespectful and shows that you are not concerned about the other person's feelings or opinions.
- **Holding a grudge** – Permitting a hurt to simmer in your heart, and not cleansing your heart of ill feelings towards your loved one, will only compound any other issues that

may arise. It will be easier to fall into angry behaviour and disrespectfulness, thus disabling the communication process.

- **Unavailability** – Making yourself available to those who need to speak to you is essential in showing that you care about them and respect them. Failing to do so, on the other hand, shows lack of concern.
- **Threatening violence or threatening to end the relationship** – It is psychologically abusive to threaten to end your relationship during an argument; it is a means of manipulation. Threatening violence is also manipulative and constitutes emotional abuse.  
The Prophet (ﷺ) said:  
«The servant (of Allah) sometimes speaks a word not knowing its impact, but for this word, he is sent down to the hellfire farther than the distance between the east and the west.» (Bukhari and Muslim)
- **Bringing up several issues at the same time** – This can overwhelm the other person and cloud the real issue that needs to be addressed.
- **Sarcasm** – Sarcasm can be disrespectful and offensive; it suggests that you are not serious about dealing with the issue at hand.
- **Dwelling on the past** – You must move beyond what has happened in the past before you can move into the future with a clear heart, free of any grudges or rancour. Dwelling on the past can make you expect something worse and can keep you from communicating in a positive manner. It can also reflect a lack of forgiveness for what has transpired.
- **Acting on every feeling** – Sometimes it is better to keep your feelings to yourself, particularly when they are negative or



abusive ones. Feelings of anger or violence, for example, should not be acted upon at all. It is better to seek refuge with Allah from Satan. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand other Muslims are safe.» (Muslim)

- **Negative statements** – Avoid negative statements, for they can hurt feelings and cause resentment.

Inshallah implementing these concepts can improve your communication skills with those around you.

### **Natural differences between men and women**

Biological differences between men and women can cause misunderstandings that derail communications. Men and women are biologically and physiologically different, and this results in emotional and mental differences. (These differences refer to men and women in general, but of course there are always exceptions to the rule.) In general, when communicating with others, it is most helpful to know them and understand their viewpoint, so it follows that when communicating with the opposite sex, it also helps to keep in mind the natural differences between men and women. You may notice some traits that are typical; thus, understanding what makes members of the opposite sex tick can go a long way in smoothing relationships. We will look into a few of these natural characteristics here.

Men and women use their brains differently. The nerve fibres that connect the two hemispheres of the brain are larger in women than in men;<sup>19</sup> thus, women tend to use both hemispheres of their brain, whereas men tend to use only the left hemisphere. Men process language in only this one hemisphere of their brain, while women process language in both hemispheres, which is why women tend to excel in language-based subjects.

There are also differences in the limbic system, which controls split-second responses. Men are quick with physical responses, while women are quick with verbal responses. Where a man may want to fight it out, a woman would want to talk it out. Men are generally more aggressive than women. Women are more empathetic than men even from birth, according to studies.<sup>20</sup>

Women are also sensitive emotionally, which makes them more susceptible to depression than men, especially during times of hormonal shifts such as during menstruation or after childbirth.

The female and male brains develop at different rates. Females become good at language earlier than males; they are better at verbal skills and tend to be stronger communicators. Males tend to excel at spatial reasoning; they are more likely to be comfortable with maps, and they tend to do better at spatial rotations in their heads.

Sex differences exist in nonverbal communications as well. Women tend to be more sensitive to nonverbal cues such as tone, emotion, or empathy. Their awareness of facial expressiveness, smiling, gazing, and body movement or position is deeper than that of the typical man, who tends to have difficulty understanding emotions that are not explicitly verbalized.

Understanding the opposite sex leads to empathy and patience. If a woman realizes that a man tends not to understand or register emotions, she can speak to him in a manner that makes her emotions clear, instead of expecting him to immediately understand her feelings without her specifically detailing them. For instance, Julie and Jim are driving, and Julie asks Jim if he wants to stop for coffee. Jim responds in the negative, and they continue. However, Julie really had wanted to stop for coffee herself. She expected Jim to read her mind and understand from her question that she in fact wanted to stop. Jim, as many men would have done, failed to pick up on the cue. In this situation, Julie should have been assertive of her desires and verbalized exactly what she wanted.



Likewise, men should realize that women are more in touch with their feelings and emotions, so they may need to make an effort to understand them as well as express their own feelings. Although women may be better at picking up nonverbal cues than men, they still desire verbal affirmation. Take the situation of Adam, a husband who provides for his wife, Mariam, in all of her needs; however he almost never tells her that he loves her. Mariam feels unloved, but when she confronts Adam, he claims that his love should be obvious because of all that he does for her. This does not make Mariam feel better. In this example, Adam should realize that a simple "I love you," could go a long way. It can indeed be beneficial for men to learn to express their feelings verbally.

### **The cultural divide**

Cultural differences can often cause misunderstandings among people, making communication unsuccessful. Hence, it is especially important to learn about others' cultures and attempt to understand their lifestyles and customs.

The exchange of messages between people is the primary element of social experience. The idea of communicating a message seems simple enough, but it often goes awry because there is more to it than just speaking and listening. There are also the tone of the voice, the body posture, and the use of language idioms and slang – all of which can easily be misinterpreted. Eighty-five percent of all communication is nonverbal, which means that your eye contact, body language, use of personal space, and use of silence are all a part of your communication.

Culture has a deep influence on many aspects of behaviour and especially on communication. The best tool for understanding other cultures, and their impact on communication, is an open mind. An old Afghan proverb says, "What you see in yourself is what you see in the world."<sup>21</sup> This is indeed true, as we have a tendency to

judge others based on our own cultural norms. Thus, having an open mind and being able to see things from another's point of view can go a long way towards successful cross-cultural communication.

### **Cultural differences**

Having knowledge of the differences between cultures is necessary for interpreting both verbal and nonverbal communication. Some cultures require explicit direct statements, while others rely more on indirect statements and unspoken context. Some cultures are democratic in nature, while others are hierarchal. Time is viewed in some cultures as a precise commodity, whereas in other cultures it is seen as circular and subordinate to people. Some cultures, including Korean culture, value the group and harmony over the individual and personal competitiveness.

Korean interpersonal relationships operate on the principle of harmony. Maintaining a peaceful, comfortable atmosphere is more important than attaining immediate goals or telling the absolute truth. Koreans believe that to accomplish something while causing unhappiness or discomfort to individuals, is to accomplish nothing at all... To Koreans, to put greater emphasis on efficiency, honesty, or some other form of moral integrity is to be cold and unfeeling.<sup>22</sup>

These values may be objectionable to people with a different set of values – such as Americans, for instance. This is why it is so important to understand each other and the differing cultural values and norms.

A similar example is seen in two proverbs: "He who runs alone will win the race" and "Better to be a fool with the crowd than wise by yourself."<sup>23</sup> The first is an American proverb, while the latter is a Mexican proverb. The difference is astounding. The American culture values the individual more greatly than does the Mexican culture, where value is seen in being part of a group.



Personal contact is another area where differences can be misinterpreted or taken as offensive. In high-contact cultures, people face each other directly, speak with loud voices, touch, have close contact, and use direct eye contact. Low-contact cultures are essentially the opposite; people interact with wider spaces between them, they do not face each other directly, there is little to no touching and only indirect eye glances, and soft voices are used. Moderate-contact cultures are a middle ground between these two. French, Italian, Latin American, Arab, African, and Russian are high-contact cultures, whereas Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans are low-contact cultures. Falling in between as moderate-contact cultures are American, Northern European, Australian, and Canadian.

Also, speaking the same language with variations can cause misunderstandings. Semantics, connotations, slang, and idiomatic expressions can cause difficulty in communication across cultures if one of the parties is not familiar with them.

The views of various cultures towards emotions may vary as well. Elisabeth Bumiller writes:

I remember asking a twenty-year-old student in economics at Delhi University... if she loved the childhood friend her parents had decided she should marry. "That's a very difficult question," she answered. "I don't know. This whole concept of love is very alien to us. We're more practical. I don't see stars, I don't hear little bells. But he's a very nice guy, and I think I'm going to enjoy spending my life with him. Is that love?" She shrugged.<sup>24</sup>

Not only do views on emotions vary, but how those emotions are communicated also varies.

An American student shares a dormitory room with a Thai student, and they seem to get on well. Then, after they have lived together for several weeks, the Thai abruptly announces

that he has applied for a transfer to another room. The American is surprised and upset and asks the Thai why he wants to move. The Thai is reluctant to speak but eventually says that he can't stand the American's noisiness, loud stereo, late visitors, and untidiness. The American is even more surprised: all this is new to him. Couldn't you have told me this sooner? He says: Maybe I could have done something about it.<sup>25</sup>

This exhibits misunderstanding based upon differences in cultural norms with regard to communicating feelings. Americans are taught that being assertive and open is part of good communication. Thais are taught that being passive and sensitive and expecting that in others is part of good communication. The Thai student expected the American student to be sensitive to his feelings; the American student expected the Thai student to articulate his feelings. This misunderstanding ended their relationship.

These examples illustrate how sensitive people can be and how easily misunderstandings can occur. This is why it is so important to develop cross-cultural communication skills.

#### *Cross-cultural communication skills*

Learning what is needed to bridge cultural gaps and enhance cross-cultural understanding will help you when you are in a situation that requires successful communication across cultures. This includes knowledge and mindfulness. Sometimes knowledge of other cultures can be gained from literature; sometimes it can be gained only through experience, which tends to be more effective and creates a learning curve. The more you interact with people of other cultures, the more you gain knowledge and begin to understand their values, mannerisms and expressions.

Let's start with mindfulness, which plays a vital role in cross-cultural communication. Mindfulness means being aware of your



own emotions, ideas and assumptions; paying attention to what is evident about another person's behaviour and assumptions; using all of your senses in the communication process; being heedful of contextual cues; understanding events from several perspectives; and being empathetic.

Some personal traits – such as openness, extraversion and agreeableness – enhance the growth of cultural understanding. Other useful skills include:

- Identifying nonverbal display rules that apply to different cultures
- Seeking to understand the cultural values attached to nonverbal norms and rules
- Expressing acknowledgment and cultural sensitivity
- Understanding that there is a strong connection between language and culture
- Having empathy for non-native speakers of your language
- Paying attention to verbal and nonverbal messages
- Developing cross-cultural paraphrasing skills so that you can restate a message in your own words
- Trying to understand cultural values from that culture's frame of reference instead of yours
- Observing and interpreting
- Knowing that all human beings are ethnocentric to some degree; fighting that tendency
- Being wary of stereotyping
- Exhibiting patience
- Being an attentive listener
- Showing respect
- Having an open heart

Putting these skills into practice will pave the way for you to enjoy successful cross-cultural communication.

Communication is a sensory-loaded process that involves listening, thinking, observing body language, wisdom, silence, caution, speaking, secret or audible supplication for guidance from Allah (ﷻ), and secret or audible supplication for protection from Satan. A smile is an especially wonderful form of interpersonal communication.

It is essential to know how to react to another person when communicating. Never respond to angry communication with an angry retort of your own; this only begins an argument, where feelings can be hurt. Patience is the best response, demonstrated through calm words or even silence. It may be necessary to wait until the person has calmed down to renew communication on the issue. Ibn al-Jawzi said:

When your companion becomes angry and says something that is unwarranted, you should not take it too hard. His situation is that of a drunken person who is not aware of what is taking place. Instead, be patient, even if it means only for a little while. If you reciprocate his words with harsh words of your own, you become like the sane person who seeks revenge on a madman, or the conscious person who seeks retribution from an unconscious one. Look at him with a merciful eye and pity him for his actions.<sup>26</sup>

Focusing on Allah, and remembering that everything we say will be recorded, can help to maintain stable and good communications that are free of abuse, offense, negativity, or anything else that would anger Allah. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«There are four things – whoever possesses them is a pure hypocrite, and whoever possesses one of them possesses a characteristic of hypocrisy until he abandons it. When he is trusted, he is disloyal;



when he speaks, he lies; when he promises, he breaks it (the promise); and when he argues, he behaves in an insolent (abusive) manner.» (Bukhari)

Avoiding the signs of hypocrisy is vital to safeguarding faith and to applying good communication skills that are free of hypocritical actions such as lying and abusive speech; this is a means of gaining reward from Allah and protecting one's faith. We should seek the hereafter, which is eternal, in all actions and deeds. We will conclude with the following hadith:

«The Prophet (ﷺ) said to Mu'âdh ibn Jabal (رضي الله عنه): Control your tongue.

Mu'âdh asked: Are we accountable for what we say?

The Prophet (ﷺ) answered: Is there anything other than the wrong actions of speech that causes people to be thrown in hell on their faces?» (An authentic hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi and al-Hâkim)

### THE PATH TO FORGIVENESS

Even with good communication, there will most likely be times in any relationship when forgiveness is needed. When you open your heart to forgiveness, you feel the warmth and fulfilment of that relationship.

It is important to make forgiveness a part of your personality; it aids in personal healing, in making amends, and in moving on. To achieve a harmonious and contented life, you must overlook and forgive the mistakes of others and cleanse your heart of any hatred or enmity.

Forgiveness is the key to achieving serenity in the heart because it is a means of cleansing the heart of negative feelings like hatred, anger, and resentment. These feelings can be self-defeating,

leading to unhappiness, depression, or anxiety. With forgiveness comes an uplifting of the spirit and a release of negativity.

Forgiveness does not come easily, whereas resentment and lack of forgiveness come quite easily. Forgiveness takes work; it rarely comes instantaneously, unless the transgression is very minor. It is not easy to get rid of a grudge or to release residual resentment. Inshallah, we will head down the path to forgiveness in this chapter, discussing how to forgive and remove grudges.

### What is forgiveness?

Qâḍi 'Iyâd defines forgiveness ('*afuw*) as 'refusing to hold something against someone else'.<sup>27</sup> 'Afuw also means 'to efface, obliterate, wipe out'.<sup>28</sup> What is being wiped out is the grudge or the ill feeling towards another, so that nothing is held against that person. Ibn Katheer says about those who forgive that "...they do not hold any ill feelings about anyone in their hearts, and this is the most excellent conduct in this regard."<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, forgiveness is defined in the *American Heritage Dictionary* as 'the act of forgiving'; to forgive is defined as 'to excuse for a fault or offense, to pardon; to renounce anger or resentment against'. Clearly, forgiveness includes more than just excusing or pardoning; it also includes freeing the heart of rancour towards the perpetrator.

From a psychological standpoint, forgiveness is defined as: the emotional replacement of (1) hot emotions of anger or fear that follow a perceived hurt or offense, or (2) unforgiveness that follows ruminating about the transgression, by substituting positive emotions such as unselfish love, sympathy, compassion, or even romantic love.<sup>30</sup>

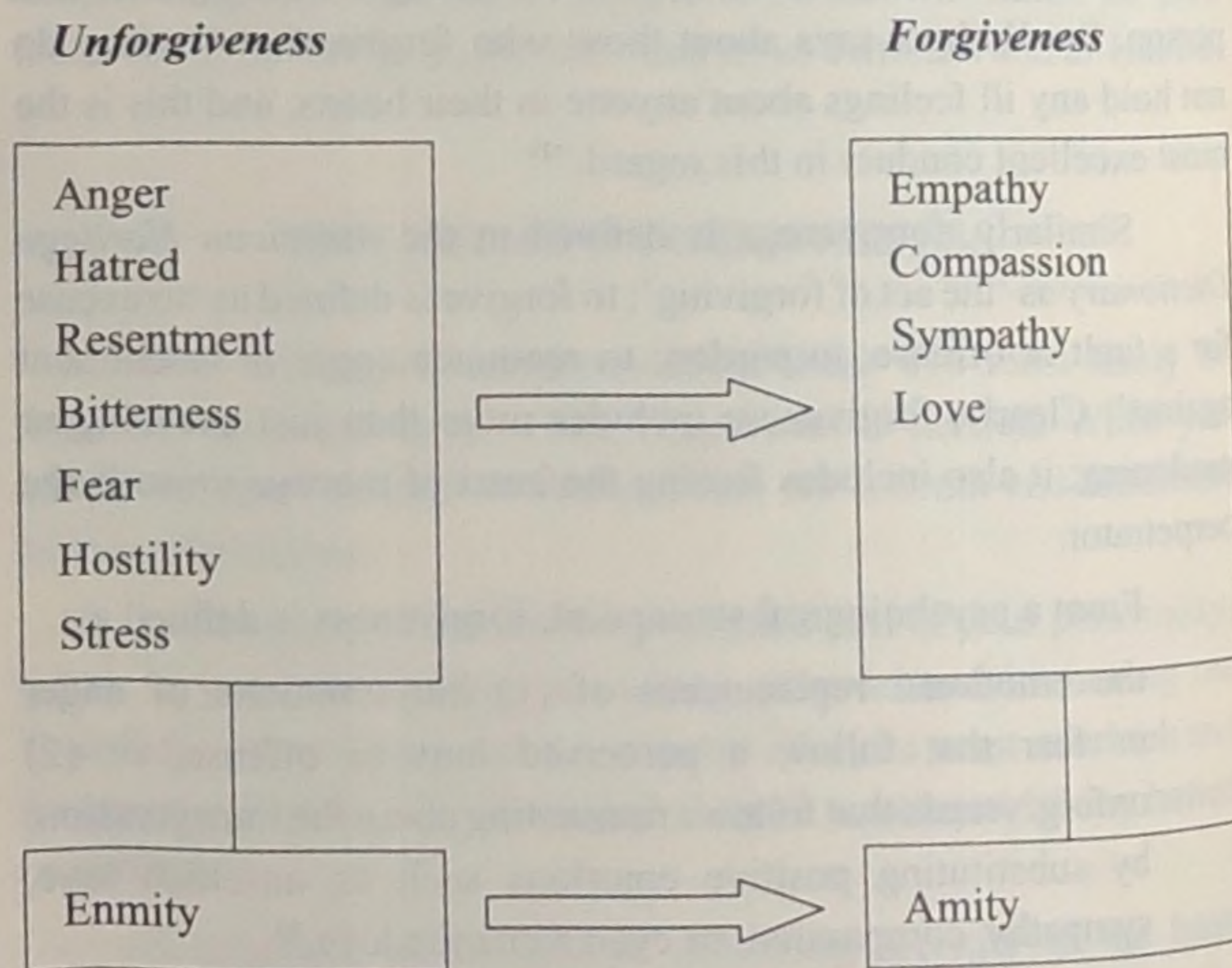
On the opposite end of the spectrum, lack of forgiveness is defined as:



...delayed emotions involving resentment, bitterness, residual anger, residual fear, hatred, hostility, and stress, which motivate people to reduce the unforgiveness.<sup>31</sup>

Lack of forgiveness is an emotion; it is a group of feelings that together create unforgiveness. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is an action. It involves granting pardon without holding onto resentment, essentially wiping away negative emotions and replacing them with positive ones, which culminates in the act of granting forgiveness. **Figure 1.1** shows the emotions involved in the act of forgiveness.

### Emotions involved in forgiving



**Figure 1.1**

### The junction

The path to forgiveness starts at the junction of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ). At the junction lies knowledge of the benefits and greatness of forgiveness. Many verses and hadiths speak about forgiveness.

﴿خُذِ الْعَفْوَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ﴾

(سورة الأعراف: الآية ١٩٩)

«Show forgiveness, enjoin what is good, and turn away from the foolish.» (Qur'an 7: 199)<sup>32</sup>

﴿... فَاصْفَحْ الصَّفْحَ الْجَمِيلَ﴾

(سورة حجر: الآية ٨٥)

«...so forgive with gracious forgiveness.» (Qur'an 15: 85)

﴿وَلَمَنْ صَبَرَ وَغَفَرَ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ لَمِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ﴾

(سورة الشورى: الآية ٤٣)

«And whoever is patient and forgives – indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination [on the part of those seeking the reward of Allah].» (Qur'an 42: 43)

Showing forgiveness is a command from Allah (ﷻ); it is a praised action that brings rewards and honour to those who forgive. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«I swear regarding three matters: no charity shall ever decrease the wealth; whenever one forgives people, Allah will magnify his honour; and he who is humble for Allah, Allah will raise his rank.» (A sound hadith recorded by Ahmad)

Forgiveness can save a person from hellfire. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«He who gives time to a debtor or forgives him, Allah will put him under His shade.» (Muslim)



Forgiveness is a means of attaining Allah's love.

﴿الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكَاظِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ  
وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾  
(سورة آل عمران: الآية ١٣٤)

«[Those] who spend [in the cause of Allah] during ease and hardship, who restrain anger and who pardon the people – [indeed] Allah loves the doers of good.»  
(Qur'an 3: 134)

Forgiving others is also a means of receiving forgiveness from Allah.

﴿... وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ﴾  
(سورة نور: الآية ٢٢)

«...let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.»  
(Qur'an 24: 22)

In explaining the Qur'anic verse mentioned above, «Show forgiveness, enjoin what is good, and turn away from the foolish» (Qur'an 7: 199), Ibn Jareer and Ibn Abi Hâtim related that:

When this was revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ), he asked Jibril to interpret it for him. Jibril told him: Wait until I ask the One who Knows. He left and came back to him and said: O Muhammad, Allah commands you to unite yourself with those who cut you off and to give to those who refuse to give to you and to pardon those who are unjust to you.<sup>33</sup>

Truly, forgiveness is a great attribute, which benefits not only the one who forgives but also the one who is forgiven. It has the power to repair broken ties and create love between people; it has the power to bring serenity to the hearts of both the forgiver and the forgiven.

Beyond the junction of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the path to forgiveness continues. Figure 1.2 illustrates this path, which we will explain in detail, inshallah.

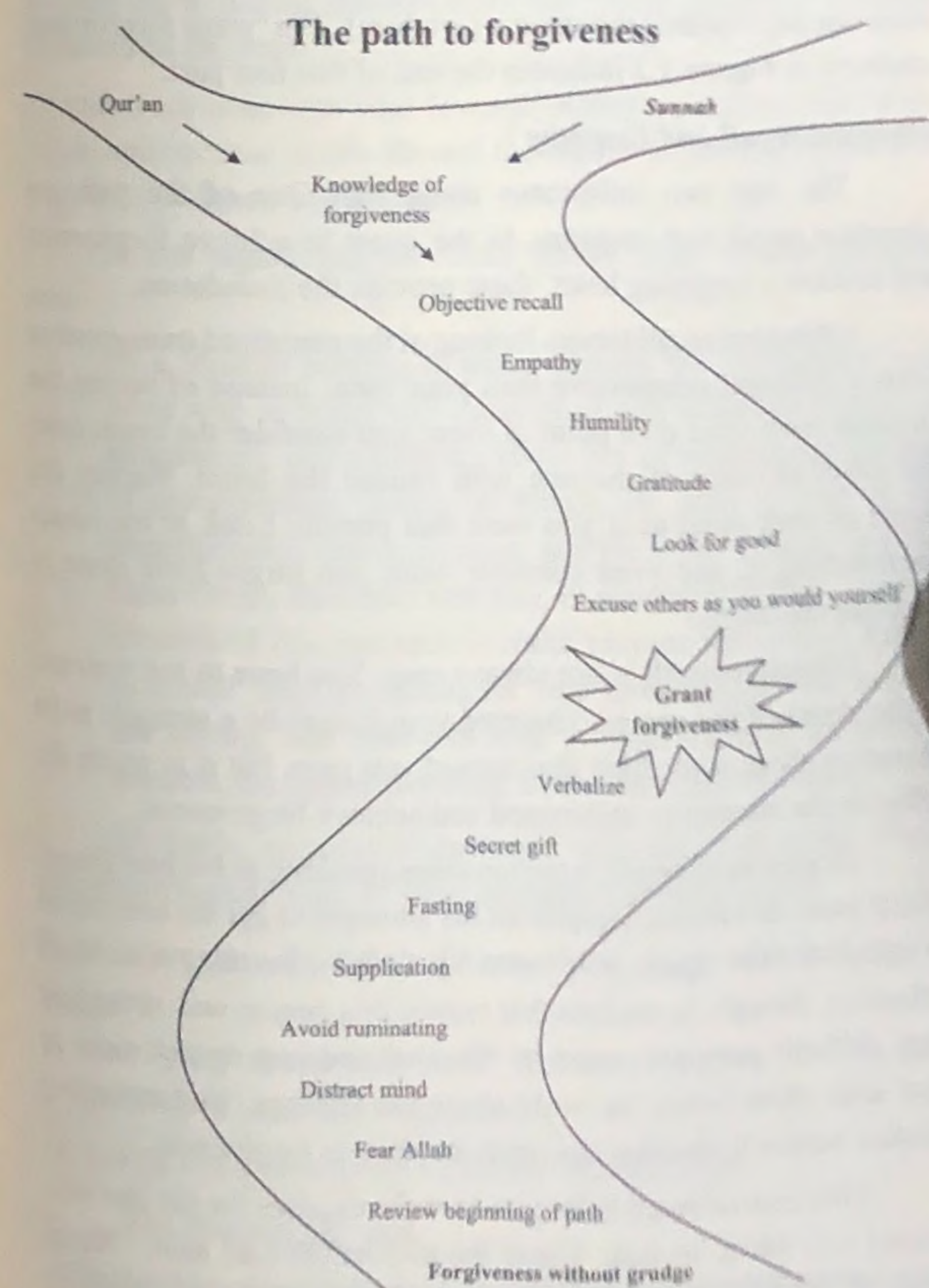


Figure 1.2



Forgiveness is a means of attaining Allah's love.

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وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾  
(سورة آل عمران: الآية ١٣٤)

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Forgiving others is also a means of receiving forgiveness from Allah.

﴿...وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ﴾  
(سورة نور: الآية ٢٢)

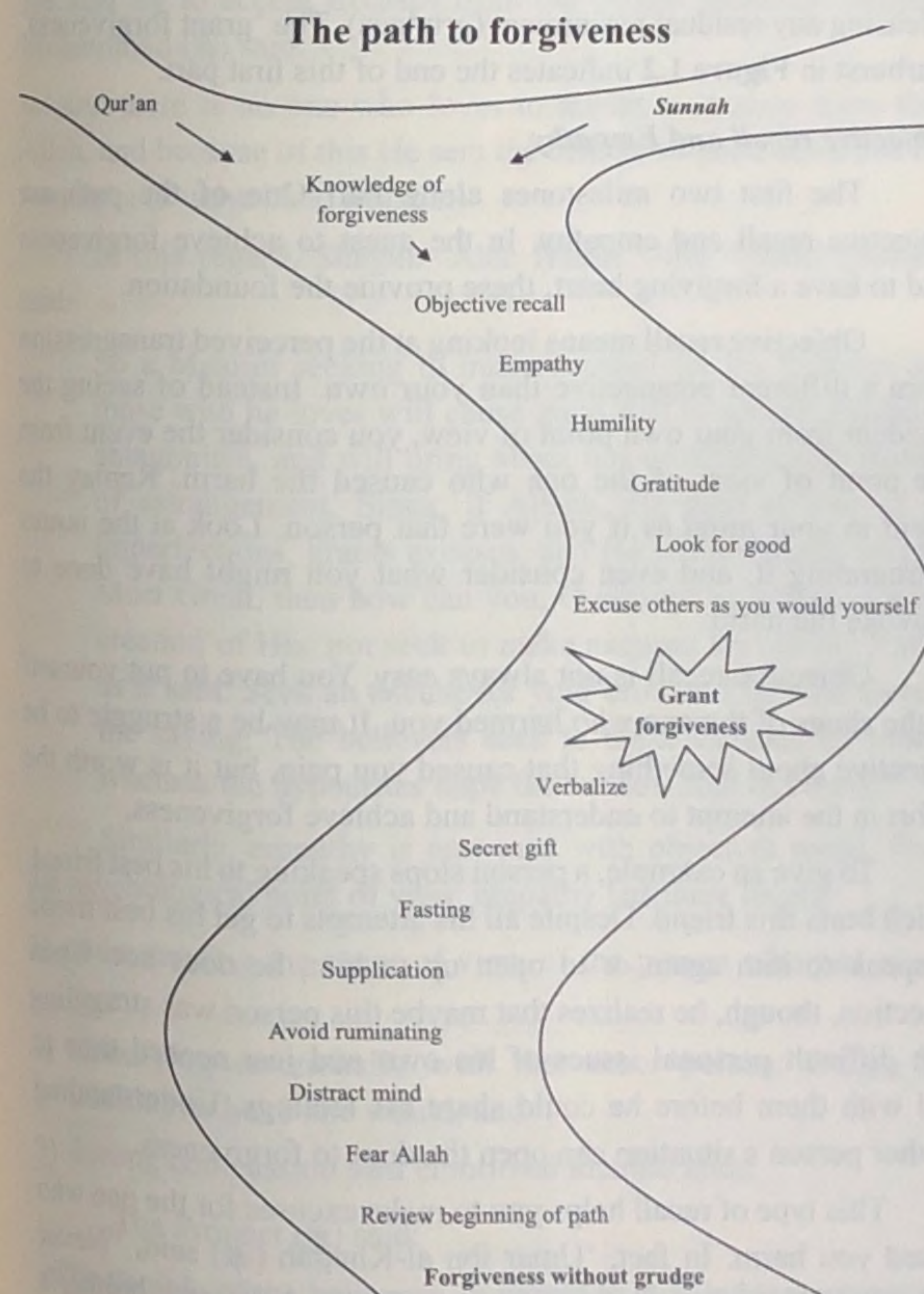
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**Figure 1.2**



**Part One: Achieving forgiveness**

The path to forgiveness consists of two distinct parts: achieving forgiveness and then holding onto that forgiveness and releasing any residual resentment (grudges). The 'grant forgiveness' starburst in **Figure 1.2** indicates the end of this first part.

***Objective recall and Empathy***

The first two milestones along Part One of the path are objective recall and empathy. In the quest to achieve forgiveness and to have a forgiving heart, these provide the foundation.

Objective recall means looking at the perceived transgression from a different perspective than your own. Instead of seeing the incident from your own point of view, you consider the event from the point of view of the one who caused the harm. Replay the event in your mind as if you were that person. Look at the issues surrounding it, and even consider what you might have done to provoke the harm.

Objective recall is not always easy. You have to put yourself in the shoes of the one who harmed you. It may be a struggle to be objective about something that caused you pain, but it is worth the effort in the attempt to understand and achieve forgiveness.

To give an example, a person stops speaking to his best friend, which hurts this friend. Despite all his attempts to get his best friend to speak to him again or to open up to him, he does not. Upon reflection, though, he realizes that maybe this person was struggling with difficult personal issues of his own and just needed time to deal with them before he could share his feelings. Understanding another person's situation can open the door to forgiveness.

This type of recall helps you to make excuses for the one who caused you harm. In fact, 'Umar ibn al-Khattâb (ؓ) said, "Never think ill of the word that comes out of your believing brother's mouth, as long as you can find a good excuse for it."<sup>34</sup> By recalling

the hurtful event objectively, you are in fact looking for an excuse for him or her.

Since Allah loves to accept excuses from His slaves, shouldn't we also try to accept excuses from our fellow Muslims? Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said:

«...and there is no one who loves to accept an excuse more than Allah, and because of this He sent the bringer of good news and the warners.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

In this regard, Shaykh 'Alee Ḥasan 'Alee 'Abdul Ḥameed said:

So a Muslim seeking to make excuses for his brothers and those who he loves will cause good will to spread instead of antagonism, and will bring about ties of relationship instead of estrangement. Since, if Allaah, He who is free of all imperfections, grants excuses, and He is the Creator and the Most Great, then how can you, O servant of Allaah, a weak creation of His, not seek to make excuses for others? Rather as is said: Seek an excuse for your brother. Likewise there is the saying: The believers seek to make excuses for others, whereas the hypocrites hope for the downfall of others.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, empathy is entwined with objective recall. From the psychological point of view, empathy has three levels:

- 1) understanding the point of view of the person who has caused harm,
- 2) identifying emotionally with that other person, feeling and thinking as he or she would, and
- 3) feeling compassion **and** emotional identification.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«The parable of the believers, in regard to the kindness, mercy, and compassion they have for each other, is that of the body; when an



organ of it falls ill, the rest of the body responds with fever and sleeplessness.» (Muslim)

Here we see how important compassion is. This is a vital part of fully empathizing with another person. From the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), we find an example of empathy in the story of how he was harmed by 'Abdullâh ibn Salool (the leader of the hypocrites in Madinah).

«Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) rode a donkey, equipped with a thick cloth covering made in Fadak, and I (Usâmah ibn Zayd) was riding behind him. He was going to pay a visit to Sa'd ibn 'Ubâdah in Banu al-Hârith ibn al-Khazraj; this incident happened before the battle of Badr. The Prophet (ﷺ) passed by a gathering in which 'Abdullâh ibn 'Ubayy ibn Salool was present; that was before 'Abdullâh ibn 'Ubayy had embraced Islam. In that gathering were people of different religions; there were Muslims, pagans, idol-worshippers and Jews, and 'Abdullâh ibn Rawâḥah was also present. When a cloud of dust raised by the donkey reached that gathering, 'Abdullâh ibn 'Ubayy covered his nose with his garment and exclaimed: Do not cover us with dust.

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) greeted them, stopped and dismounted, invited them to Allah (to embrace Islam), and recited to them the noble Qur'an. On that, 'Abdullâh ibn 'Ubayy ibn Salool said: O man! There is nothing better than that which you say. If it is the truth, do not trouble us with it in our gatherings. Return to your mount (or residence) and if somebody comes to you, relate (your tales) to him.

On that, 'Abdullâh ibn Rawâḥah said: Yes, O Allah's Messenger! Bring it (that is, what you want to say) to us in our gathering, for we love that.

The Muslims, the pagans and the Jews started abusing one another until they were on the point of fighting with one another. The Prophet

(ﷺ) kept on quieting them until they became quiet, whereupon he rode his animal (mount) and proceeded until he reached Sa'd ibn 'Ubâdah.

The Prophet (ﷺ) asked Sa'd: Did you not hear what Abu Ḥubbâb ('Abdullâh ibn 'Ubayy) said? He said such-and-such.

Upon hearing that, Sa'd ibn 'Ubâdah replied: O Allah's Messenger! Excuse and forgive him, for by Him Who revealed the Book to you, Allah brought the truth which was sent to you at the time when the people of this town (Madinah) had unanimously decided to crown him and tie a turban on his head (electing him as chief). But when Allah opposed that (decision) through the truth which Allah gave to you, he ('Abdullâh ibn 'Ubayy) was grieved with jealousy, and that caused him to do what you have seen.

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) excused him, for the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions used to forgive the pagans and the People of the Scripture as Allah had ordered them, and they used to patiently put up with their mischief. Allah (ﷻ) tells us:

«... وَلَتَسْمَعَنَّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا أَذًى كَثِيرًا ...»  
(سورة آل عمران: الآية ١٨٦)

«...And you will surely hear much abuse from those who were given the scripture before you and from those who associate others with Allah...»  
(Qur'an 3: 186)

Allah also informs us:

«وَدَّ كَثِيرٌ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يَرُدُّونَكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِكُمْ كُفَّارًا حَسَدًا مِنْ عِنْدِ أَنْفُسِهِمْ ...»  
(سورة البقرة: الآية ١٠٩)

«Many of the People of the Scripture wish they could turn you back to disbelief after you have believed, out of envy from themselves...»  
(Qur'an 2: 109)



The Prophet (ﷺ) stuck to the principle of forgiveness for them as long as Allah ordered him to do so, until Allah permitted fighting them. When Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) fought the battle of Badr, and Allah killed the nobles of the Quraysh through him, Ibn 'Ubayy ibn Salool and the pagans and idolaters who were with him exclaimed: This matter (Islam) has appeared (that is, become victorious). So they gave the pledge of allegiance to Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) and became Muslims.» (Bukhari)

In this story, Sa'd ibn 'Ubâdah (رضي الله عنه) shows empathy for 'Abdullâh ibn Salool, recognizing the jealousy he felt because of what had happened. He put himself in 'Abdullâh's shoes, understanding his situation and looking at his emotional state and finally having compassion for him, which was exhibited by his imploring the Prophet (ﷺ) to forgive him. Sa'd's empathic description of 'Abdullâh resulted in the Prophet's forgiving 'Abdullâh. This is an excellent example of the strength of empathy.

### Humility and Gratitude

Humility and gratitude are the next milestones along the path to forgiveness. Here, it becomes necessary to move the focus away from the person who harmed you, focusing on yourself and any harm you may have inflicted upon others. No one is perfect; at some point, whether inadvertently or not, most of us have caused another person some type of hurt. Given that we are not faultless, how can we expect the transgressor to be faultless? You have been in need of forgiveness at some point; remembering these times in your life can help you to develop compassion for the one who caused you pain. Certainly, the Qur'an teaches us humbleness:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ  
يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ أَذِلَّةٌ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٌ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ ...﴾

(سورة مائدة: الآية ٥٤)

«O you who have believed, whoever of you should revert from his religion [Islam] – Allah will bring forth [in place of them] a people He will love and who will love Him [who are] humble towards the believers, powerful [stern] against the disbelievers...»

(Qur'an 5: 54)

Humbleness helps us to realize that we also need to be forgiven for our faults; hence, we are inspired to forgive others. We see that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Allah has revealed to me that you must be humble so that no one oppresses another and boasts over another.» (Recorded by Abu Dâwood; al-Albâni graded it as sound)

One of the early Muslims said, "One of you might see his own faults but he still loves himself. He then hates his Muslim brother on suspicion. So where is the logic?"<sup>36</sup>

It may not be mere suspicion in a case where someone has actually caused you harm, but the concept still applies: we love ourselves despite making mistakes, but for others, we apply harsher conditions, and unforgiveness reigns. It is desirable to have mercy on others just as we would have mercy on ourselves. It is reported that Jesus (ﷺ) said:

Do not look at people's faults as if you are lords, but look at your own faults as if you are slaves, because people are of two types: afflicted and pardoned. So have mercy on the afflicted and thank Allah for pardoning you and protecting you from it.<sup>37</sup>

It has also been said:

If someone impresses you with a good character and sound judgement, don't remain aloof from him or her because of some minor fault that is surrounded by an ocean of virtues. You will not find, as long as you live, a person so cultivated



that he or she is free from blemish and sin. Contemplate your own self and how it often errs and strays. This kind of introspection makes your demands on others more balanced and makes you more sympathetic to the sinner.<sup>38</sup>

Acknowledging your own transgressions leads you to gratitude. Reminiscing about an incident in your life where you were forgiven, and remembering how good it felt to be forgiven, can inspire you to forgive someone else. Thanking others is part of good character. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said:

«He who does not thank people does not thank Allah.» (An authentic hadith recorded by Ahmad and at-Tirmidhi)

Therefore, being thankful for forgiveness from others can lead to forgiving. This is the effect of gratitude.

#### ***Look for good and Excuse others as you would yourself***

Continuing along the path to forgiveness in **Figure 1.2**, we come across 'Look for good' and 'Excuse others as you would yourself'. These two milestones complete Part One of the path. At this point, you must look for the good in the one who has harmed you and avoid criticizing him or her. Everyone's personality and behaviour has some positive aspects; focusing on these, instead of the negative aspects, can aid in achieving forgiveness. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Let not a believing man hate his believing wife; if he dislikes one quality in her, then he will be pleased with another.» (Muslim)

This advice can be applied to all relationships. In other words, looking for good in others lets you see characteristics with which you are content.

Applying this hadith can remove some of the anxiety that results from stressful relationships. We are advised to remain cheerful and to be at peace with those around us. In order to find

peace, soften your heart by focusing on people's virtues instead of their faults; otherwise, the love you have for those close to you will be damaged by negativity.

Criticizing and concentrating on the faults of those who have harmed you only serves to increase enmity and resentment. It is reported that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) once ascended the pulpit and said in a loud voice:

«O hypocrites! Do not harm the Muslims, do not revile them, and do not pursue their faults. Verily, whoever pursues the faults of his brother Muslim, Allah will pursue his faults; and he whose faults are pursued, Allah will disgrace him even inside his dwelling.» (Recorded by at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Hibbân; the grade for this hadith is acceptable)

We find in a story of the Prophet (ﷺ) an example of refraining from criticizing a transgressor:

«Before he was a Muslim, Zayd ibn Sa'na came to the Prophet (ﷺ), demanding that he repay a debt. Zayd pulled the garment from the Prophet's shoulder, seized hold of him and behaved coarsely towards the Prophet (ﷺ), saying: Banu 'Abdul Muṭṭalib, you are procrastinating. 'Umar chased him off and spoke harshly to him, while the Prophet (ﷺ) merely smiled...» (Recorded by al-Bayhaqi, Ibn Hibbân, at-Tirmidhi and Abu Nu'aym; the grade for this hadith is acceptable)

The Prophet (ﷺ) did not criticize Zayd; instead he patiently bore the abuse.

Likewise, ash-Sha'bi would say, "Whoever sought the mistakes of his brothers is left with no friends."<sup>39</sup> Looking for the good qualities in people instead helps bring compassion and mercy to the heart and helps in the effort to excuse them.

Often we are quick to excuse ourselves, but we act in a totally opposite manner with others. We should treat others as we would



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Often we are quick to excuse ourselves, but we act in a totally opposite manner with others. We should treat others as we would



treat ourselves, excusing them as we would excuse ourselves. Muhammad ibn Maqâtil used to say:

Beware of the harm of the one to whom you do good and excuse your brother the way you excuse yourself. You pardon yourself if you do wrong; but other than you are left unpardoned. You see in his eye a speck of dust; whilst in yours a tree trunk you see not!<sup>40</sup>

Recognizing how easily we excuse ourselves can bring us to the point of granting forgiveness to anyone who has harmed us. Knowing the enormity of forgiveness, recalling the incident objectively, empathizing with the transgressor, having humility by focusing on personal faults, being grateful for having been forgiven, looking for the good qualities of the transgressor, and being willing to excuse others as we would ourselves will bring us to the point where we can grant forgiveness.

Undeniably, forgiveness is a noble act, and it is one that the Prophet (ﷺ) practiced. His biographers report that during the battle of Uhud, the Prophet's face was cut and his tooth was broken. His companions became distressed and requested that he invoke a curse against their enemies. However, the Prophet (ﷺ) would not do so; he explained that he was not sent to curse but to guide. He proceeded to supplicate to Allah to guide his people and forgive them. This incident exemplifies bounteousness, virtue, generosity and extreme patience. The Prophet did not keep silent; he pardoned his enemies, showing compassion and even supplicating for them.<sup>41</sup>

What an impressive example Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is for all of humankind to follow! His magnificent way encourages the greatly beneficial act of forgiveness.

Forgiveness can be thought of as a gift. Giving the gift of forgiveness can relieve the heart of rancour, bitterness and anger, bringing peace and contentment instead. Like all gifts, it should be accompanied by good wishes for the recipient.

«It is narrated by Jareer ibn 'Abdullâh (رضي الله عنه) that he observed: I pledged my allegiance to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) on the observance of prayer, payment of zakâh, and sincerity and wishing the best for every Muslim.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«There are three things on account of which no rancour enters a Muslim heart: the sincerity of purpose for Allah's sake, seeking goodness for the Muslims and adhering to their main body, and for their prayers to encompass them all round.» (Recorded by at-Tirmidhi; a sound hadith according to al-Albâni)

Together, forgiveness and good will can mend broken hearts and damaged relationships. Still, even after forgiveness is granted, residual negative feelings often linger in the heart and mind, and they can cause you to slip back into the depths of unforgiveness. Part Two of the path to forgiveness discusses holding onto that forgiveness and releasing any lingering grudges you may have.

## Part Two: Holding onto forgiveness

In order to hold onto forgiveness without falling back into resentment, you need strength of mind and intention. In other words, you must be committed to holding onto forgiveness, and you must not allow any rancour back into your heart. The first milestone along Part Two of the path is to verbalize your forgiveness.

### Verbalize

Verbalizing forgiveness does not necessarily mean that you tell the person who has harmed you. Every situation is unique, and in some situations that may not be the best thing to do. However, you should at least state it clearly to yourself, so that you are absolutely sure you have forgiven them. This way, when your will is weakened or resentment creeps in, you can remember that you



have definitely forgiven them; this will help you to hold onto that forgiveness. It might also be helpful to confide in a close friend that you have forgiven the person who harmed you, so that this friend can remind you if you begin to weaken.

Another thing that you can do is write out your forgiveness. This can be done in several ways, such as writing a forgiveness certificate (see Appendix B), writing a letter to the transgressor that you keep and do not send, or just writing in your diary that you forgave So-and-so. These things can be used during times of need to remind yourself that you have forgiven and thus help rid yourself of any grudge.

From the example of the Prophet (ﷺ), we see that sometimes he did verbalize his forgiveness. In the following story, it is narrated to us that he forgave the woman who had poisoned his food. Ibn Shihâb said:

«Jabir ibn ‘Abdullâh used to say that a Jewish woman from the inhabitants of Khaybar poisoned a roasted sheep and presented it to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), who took its foreleg and ate from it. A group of his Companions ate with him. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) then said: Take your hands away (from the food). The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) sent someone to call the woman.

He asked her: Have you poisoned this sheep?

She inquired: Who has informed you?

He replied: This foreleg that I have in my hand has informed me.

She said: Yes.

He asked her: What did you intend by it?

She answered: I thought that if you were a prophet, it would not harm you; if you were not a prophet, we should rid ourselves of you.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) forgave her and did not punish her. However, some of his Companions who ate from it died.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Verbalizing forgiveness does not need to be public, though, as in the above case of the Prophet (ﷺ). Depending on the situation, it may be wiser to privately verbalize the forgiveness. Either way, some type of verbalization is important in the endeavour to release resentment.

### *Secret gift*

Continuing along on our path, the next milestone is to present a secret gift to the transgressor. This can take many forms, but the uniqueness of it is in the fact that it is secret; the transgressor does not know that it came from you and perhaps does not even know that there was a gift at all. For example, let's say Brother A is making the call to prayer in the mosque. Brother B hears him and opens one of the doors to the mosque, so that Brother A's voice can be heard further away. The more people who heard the call to prayer, the more good deeds Brother A earned, although he never knew that Brother B did this for him. This is an example of a secret gift that the receiver did not even know about; with this gift, the heart of the giver is opened up towards the receiver. This is why, when you are in need of softening the heart, it is helpful to give a secret gift to someone you have forgiven.

This gift could be anything, ranging from financial help to passing along a book or any other present through a third party (while requesting anonymity), or simply removing something harmful from a pathway on which the person often walks. It could also be supplication to Allah (ﷻ) for him or her. This is an excellent gift and one that can have a strong effect on the heart of the forgiver. Let us look again at the example of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in this regard. We mentioned earlier the story of the Prophet's forgiveness on the day of the battle of Uḥud. Indeed, he used to supplicate for those who had hurt him, saying:

«O Allah, guide my people, for they do not know.» (Bukhari)



Supplicating for another Muslim is even beneficial to you, for the Prophet (ﷺ) explained:

«If a Muslim invokes Allah for the benefit of his absent brother, the angels say afterwards: amen, and for you the same.» (Muslim)

The giving of a secret gift to soften your heart towards the one who has harmed you can also extend to giving a present openly. Gift-giving has the power to bring compassionate feelings to the heart, and that is what is needed to hold onto forgiveness. An example of this is when Abu Bakr (رضي الله عنه) forgave Mistah ibn Uthathah (رضي الله عنه), one of the men who had slandered Abu Bakr's daughter 'A'ishah (رضي الله عنها). She narrated:

«When Allah gave the declaration of my innocence, Abu Bakr, who used to provide for Mistah ibn Uthathah because he was his relative, said: By Allah, I will never provide Mistah with anything because of what he said about 'A'ishah. However, Allah later revealed:

﴿وَلَا يَأْتَلِ أُولُو الْفَضْلِ مِنْكُمْ وَالسَّعَةِ أَنْ يُؤْتُوا أُولِيَ الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ  
وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ  
وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ﴾ (سورة نور: الآية ٢٢)

«And let not those of virtue among you and wealth swear not to give [aid] to their relatives and the needy and the emigrants for the cause of Allah, and let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.» (Qur'an 24: 22)

After that, Abu Bakr said: Yes, by Allah, I want Allah to forgive me. He resumed helping Mistah, whom he had been helping previously.» (Bukhari)

### **Fasting and Supplication**

Fasting and supplication can be big helps in holding onto forgiveness. Fasting takes away physical strength and energy, as the following hadith attests:

«Qaza'ah reported: I came to Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri (رضي الله عنه), who was surrounded (by people). When they had dispersed, I said to him: I am not going to ask you about what these people were asking; I ask you about fasting on a journey.

He said: We travelled with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) towards Makkah, and we had been observing a fast. We halted at a place.

There the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: You are nearing your enemy, and breaking your fast will give you greater strength.

That was a concession (given to us), so some of us continued to observe the fast, and some of us broke it. We then dismounted at another place, and he (the Prophet [ﷺ]) said: You are going to encounter the enemy in the morning, and breaking the fast will give you strength, so break the fast.

That was an order, so we broke the fast. But subsequently we saw ourselves observing the fast with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) on a journey.» (Muslim)

With less physical strength, the fasting person is left with less energy to be angry and resentful. Fasting is a protection not only from the hellfire but from committing sins as well. It inspires you to focus on Allah, thus acting as a means to release a grudge against another person. With your mind on Allah and obeying Him, and your body weakened, you do not have the drive to be angry with someone or to hold onto ill feelings. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said:

«Allah said: All the deeds of the children of Adam (meaning all people) are for them, except fasting, which is for Me, and I will give the reward for it. Fasting is a shield or protection from the fire and from committing sins. If one of you is fasting, he should avoid



sexual relations with his wife and quarrelling, and if someone should fight or quarrel with him, he should say: I am fasting.» (Bukhari)

Supplication, likewise, is always beneficial in all aspects of life. In this case, you may be able to alleviate unwanted bitterness by asking Allah to release resentment from your heart, asking Him to soften your heart towards the person who has transgressed against you, asking Allah to mend your relationship with the person, and asking Allah to bring peace to your thoughts and mind about your situation. Allah answers the supplications of those who call on Him, as He confirms:

﴿وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ﴾ (سورة البقرة: الآية ١٨٦)

«And when My servants ask you [O Muhammad] concerning Me – indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided.» (Qur'an 2: 186)

#### **Avoid ruminating and Distract mind**

Ruminating can be dangerous and damaging to the person who is trying to release a grudge, because it only increases anger, bitterness, and enmity. Replaying events from a negative point of view and dwelling on their negative aspects weakens your forgiveness. When you are tempted to mull over an offense, distracting your mind becomes necessary. Praising Allah and thanking Him for all of the blessings you have, and thinking about positive features in your life, can easily take your mind away from reflecting on the negative.

Your mind will often wander if it is not occupied. This brings us to a hadith of the Prophet (ﷺ) about taking advantage of such times:

«Take benefit of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty,

your free time before you are preoccupied, and your life before your death.» (Recorded by al-Hâkim and al-Bayhaqi; al-Albâni graded it as sound)

You can take advantage of your time by remembering Allah, praying supererogatory prayers, or reading the Qur'an. Using free time in this manner essentially distracts the mind from straying into bitter memories and resentment. If, at any time, bad memories do creep into your head, you should utter remembrances of Allah. Simply saying *Lâ ilâha illâ Allâh* can redirect your mind towards Allah and His pleasure. Distracting the mind is a valuable tool in the endeavour to release a grudge.

#### **Fear Allah (ﷻ)**

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ...﴾

(سورة آل عمران: الآية ١٠٢)

«O you who have believed, fear Allah [by doing all that He has ordered and by abstaining from all that He has forbidden] as He should be feared...» (Qur'an 3: 102)

Fear of Allah can inspire forgiveness. The following story is based upon this verse of the Qur'an:

﴿الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكَاظِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: الآية ١٣٤)

«[Those] who spend [in the cause of Allah] during ease and hardship, who restrain anger and who pardon the people – and Allah loves the doers of good.» (Qur'an 3: 134)

One of the early Muslims had a slave who angered him. He was on the verge of punishing him when the slave quoted this verse: «[Those] who restrain their anger».



The man calmed down and restrained his anger. The slave continued:  
«and who pardon the people».

The man took heed and forgave him. The slave finally said:

«and Allah loves the doers of good».

Upon hearing this, the man freed his slave.<sup>42</sup>

What a tremendous example of forgiveness as a result of fearing Allah! Fearing Allah and fearing the torment of the Day of Judgement can inspire both forgiveness and letting go of a grudge. That day will be an overwhelming day, on which all of us will be held accountable for our actions and rewarded accordingly, with justice. Everyone will need Allah's mercy that day. Worshipping Allah (ﷻ) is a means of attaining mercy, and forgiving others is a great part of this. You can look back at the many verses of the Qur'an that invite us to forgive. (They were mentioned previously in discussing the junction of the Qur'an and Sunnah). These verses, along with fear of Allah, can motivate you to let peace enter your heart and let resentment leave it.

Indeed, your acts of forgiveness will be in your favour on that awe-inspiring day. The Prophet (ﷺ) illustrated this when he said:

«There was a merchant who used to lend to the people. Whenever his debtor was in straitened circumstances, he would say to his employees: Forgive him so that Allah may forgive us. So Allah forgave him.» (Bukhari)

Everyone certainly needs and wants Allah's forgiveness; as mentioned above, forgiving others is a way to gain it. Allah instructs us:

«وَلَا يَأْتَلِ أُولُو الْفَضْلِ مِنْكُمْ وَالسَّعَةِ أَنْ يُؤْتُوا أُولِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ  
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وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ» (سورة نور: الآية ٢٢)

«And let not those of virtue among you and wealth swear not to give [aid] to their relatives and the needy and the emigrants for the cause of Allah, and let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.» (Qur'an 24: 22)

Fear of Allah and hope for His forgiveness can be powerful motivators when we are making an effort to forgive someone and let go of a grudge against that person. We definitely would not want to lose the opportunity to be forgiven by Allah because of enmity between ourselves and fellow Muslims. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«The gates of paradise are only opened on two days, Monday and Thursday, and then every servant (of Allah) who does not associate anything with Allah is granted pardon – except the person in whose (heart) there is rancour against his brother. It will be said: Look towards both of them until there is reconciliation, look towards both of them until there is reconciliation, look towards both of them until there is reconciliation.» (Muslim)

### *Review the beginning of the path*

This is the last milestone along Part Two of the path to forgiveness. If you are having difficulty with ill feelings in the heart, it may be necessary to review the beginning of the path. Repeating objective recall; having empathy, humility and gratitude; looking for the good and excusing others as you would yourself can strengthen your forgiveness and help to enforce, once again, the means to relieve the heart and to forgive.

The one who has a forgiving nature possesses a wonderful quality that can have great benefits. Forgiveness is not only a means to gain Allah's forgiveness, but it is also a means to earn His love and protection from the hellfire. Forgiveness can give hearts rest and contentment after having been harmed. This lesson is useful in many aspects of life. Realistically, there will most likely be times in



any relationship when feelings get hurt or misunderstandings occur. Times like these require forgiveness to heal hearts and relationships.

The Prophet's character exemplified the way of forgiveness. 'Â'ishah (رضي الله عنها) narrates that:

«Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) never took revenge (against anyone) for his own sake, but only when Allah's legal bounds were transgressed, in which case he would take revenge for Allah's sake.» (Bukhari)

Anas ibn Mâlik (رضي الله عنه) narrated:

«I was walking with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), and he was wearing a cloak from Najrân, with a thick border. A Bedouin met him and pulled the mantle so violently that I saw it leaving marks from its border on the Messenger's neck. He (the Bedouin) said: Muhammad, issue a command that I should be given out of the wealth of Allah that is at your disposal.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) turned his attention to him and smiled, then ordered a gift (provision) for him.» (Muslim)

The Prophet (ﷺ) responded to the Bedouin's coarseness with good nature. He refrained from acting harshly towards the perpetrator, although that is often an immediate reaction. Allah directs us:

﴿ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ السَّيِّئَةِ نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَصِفُونَ﴾

(سورة مؤمنون: الآية ٩٦)

«Repel, by [means of] what is best, [their] evil. We are Most Knowing of what they describe.» (Qur'an 23: 96)

Good conduct and forgiveness are honourable ways to reply to a transgression and are certainly better for the believer. Qatadah was asked, "Which person has the highest standing?" He replied, "The one most abundant in his pardon."<sup>43</sup>

Forgiveness indeed brings honour to the one who gives it readily and abundantly. Generously giving the gift of forgiveness

causes love to grow between the forgiver and the forgiven, and it is a way of keeping rancour away from the hearts. Ash-Shâfi'i said, "A thousand friends to a person is not plenty; but one enemy verily is too many."<sup>44</sup>

Shaykh al-Islâm Ibn Taymiyah was another model of plentiful forgiveness, of responding to a transgression with what is better. When he was released from jail, he forgave all those who had been involved in imprisoning him. He wrote in a letter:

I do not want that anybody should be avenged for my sufferings or for leveling false allegations against me, for, I have already forgiven every one of them. I desire well-being of every Muslim – the same as I desire for myself. All those persons who discredited me or deposed false evidence against me or caused trouble to me are not the least accountable so far as I am concerned; no responsibility lies upon them on my score.<sup>45</sup>

Forgiveness is essential for maintaining good relations; it fosters love and affection among people. Without it, resentment simmers and the relationship sours. To prevent that, head down the path of forgiveness and find forgiveness without a grudge to attain serenity, contentment, and a blessed and revived relationship.

﴿وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ﴾ وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا ذُو حَظٍّ عَظِيمٍ

(سورة فصلت: الآية ٣٤-٣٥)

«The good deed and the evil deed cannot be equal. Repel [the evil] with one which is better [in other words, Allah ordered the faithful believers to be patient at the time of anger, and to excuse those who treat them badly], then verily! – he, between whom and you there was enmity, [will become] as though he was a close friend. But



none is granted it [the above quality] except those who are patient, and none is granted it except the owner of the great portion [of the happiness in the hereafter (paradise) and in this world of a high moral character].<sup>46</sup>

Only the believers are granted the outstanding ability to forgive when angry; doing so will bring closeness and a loving bond. Ibn Katheer says in his commentary of this verse:

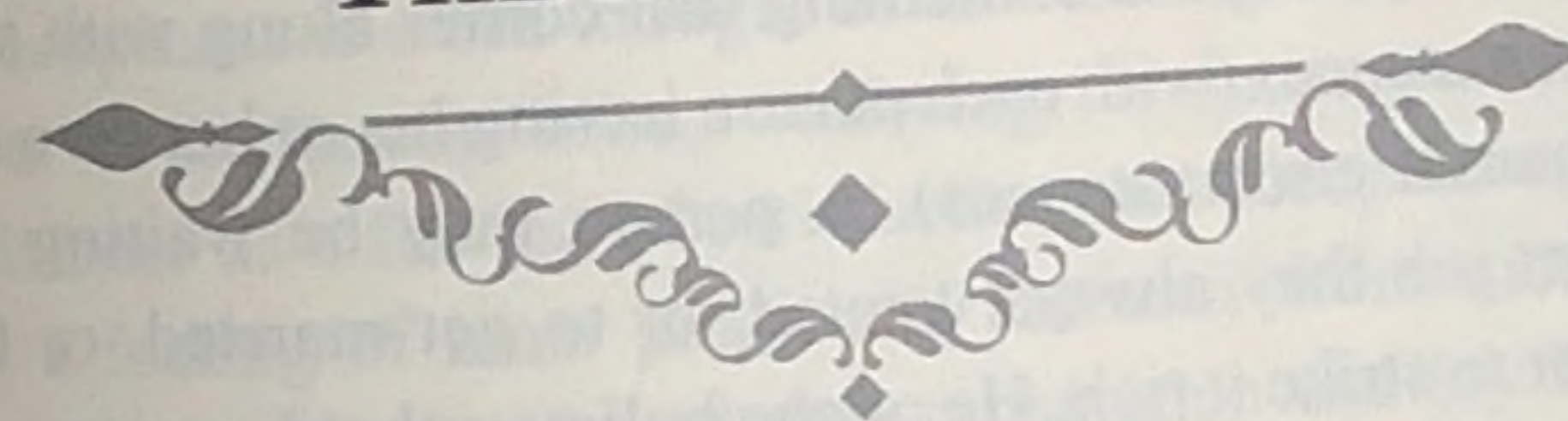
«Repel [the evil] with one which is better» means, when someone does you wrong, repel him by treating him well, as 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, said, There is no better punishment for one who has disobeyed Allah with regard to you, than your obeying Allah with regard to him.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, this will lead to reconciliation and friendship between you and the one who wronged you. This advice is heeded by those who are patient, because implementing it requires patience and forgiveness, attributes of those who will attain paradise in the next life.

'Ali ibn Abi Ṭalḥah reported that Ibn 'Abbâs explained this Âyah (verse): Allah commands the believers to be patient when they feel angry, to be forbearing when confronted with ignorance, and to forgive when they are mistreated. If they do this, Allah will save them from the *Shayṭân* (Satan) and subdue their enemies to them until they become like close friends.<sup>48</sup>

We should all strive to reach this high level of forgiveness, to be patient, and to be true believers, thus achieving contentment with a cleansed heart.

## THE END RESULT





## HAPPINESS

With the knowledge of how to achieve self-fulfilment in hand, the door is opened to true happiness in life. True contentment is something that most people would like to have in their lives. Life is often filled with trials and tribulations that overwhelm people with sadness and depression. Life is an ongoing struggle to attain paradise through obedience to Allah (ﷻ). Indeed, Allah created us to worship Him; this is the ultimate purpose in life. Fulfilling this purpose is the aim, and finding happiness in doing so is a bonus from Allah. Nevertheless, finding happiness, even when faced with these trials, is possible for everyone.

Actually, the expression 'finding happiness' is not quite accurate. Happiness is not found; it is made. Some people are led to believe that happiness is something that comes along with a certain set of circumstances (with each person having his or her own specific set of required circumstances). A person may be waiting to land that perfect job they always wanted, or to get married, or to have children, or to strike it rich. He or she believes that happiness comes with some type of material gain or is 'found' at some point in life.

This notion of happiness is indeed elusive, because happiness is a choice that individuals make for themselves. You create your own happiness, regardless of the circumstances. Happiness comes from within, from accepting yourself and your life. It is a disposition, a way of feeling and thinking that can accompany any situation or set of circumstances.

It is easy to become depressed, anxious, sad, resentful, or angry due to situations that occur in life. On the other hand, it takes a conscious choice, and often some effort, to stay happy throughout difficult or saddening circumstances.

The keys to creating your own happiness are many and varied. We have divided them into three main keys, each having its own set

of ridges. There is the faith key (ways to happiness through faith), the thoughts key (ways to happiness through the controlling of thoughts), and the sharing key (ways to happiness through sharing and generosity). With all of the keys in hand, you have the means and ability to be content with your life, even when faced with the most trying circumstances.

### Are you happy?

Many people go through life never really knowing true happiness. They might have moments of laughter and fun, but contentment with their lives, deep in their hearts, is unknown to them. They may be so used to unhappiness that they do not even realize that they are unhappy.

Happiness is often thought of as a feeling of satisfaction, joy, pleasure, contentment, bliss, wellbeing, or inner peace. We will define it here as a feeling of satisfaction and acceptance of Allah's decree, a feeling of inner peace and harmony from submission to Allah alone, and a feeling of true satisfaction and joy that comes from within.

In an article entitled, "What is the Definition of Happiness?", David Leonhardt compiled some other beneficial descriptions of happiness:

- Happiness is the ultimate realization that everything was, and is, exactly as it should be. (Paul from the Netherlands)
- Realize that true happiness lies within you. Waste no time and effort searching for peace and contentment and joy in the world outside. Remember that there is no happiness in having or getting, but only in giving. Reach out. Share. Smile. Hug. Happiness is a perfume you cannot pour on others without getting a few drops on yourself. (Og Mandino)



- A happy person is not a person in a certain set of circumstances, but rather a person with a certain set of attitudes. (Hugh Downs)
- Happiness... is not a destination: it is a manner of travelling. (Haim Ginott)
- Happiness comes only from appreciating what you have right now. You can even be happy by appreciating your troubles because they are helping to build your character. (Harriet Meyerson)<sup>49</sup>

This having been said, are you really happy? Are you satisfied and content with yourself and your life? Are you thankful to Allah for all He has given you? Have you accepted His will? To help you gauge your situation, here are some symptoms, or warning signs, of unhappiness.

- Feeling frustrated or annoyed most of the time
- Worrying about every little thing
- Hurrying almost all of the time
- Overeating
- Being cynical or sarcastic much of the time
- Not enjoying being alone
- Being highly critical
- Holding a grudge for a long time
- Needing to be right
- Blaming others when things do not go your way
- Overworking
- Not sleeping soundly
- Watching TV for hours every day<sup>50</sup>

In order to alleviate these symptoms and minimize unhappiness, you must secure the keys to happiness for yourself.

### The faith key

The faith key, like all of the keys to happiness, has a number of ridges, or aspects of faith that lead to happiness.

#### Decree of Allah (ﷻ)

﴿مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿٢٢﴾ لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَى مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ ﴿٢٣﴾﴾

(سورة الحديد: الآية ٢٢-٢٣)

(No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register [that is, the preserved slate] before We bring it into being – indeed that, for Allah, is easy – in order that you do not despair over what has eluded you and not exult [in pride] over what He has given you. And Allah does not like [those who are] self-deluded and boastful.) (Qur'an 57: 22-23)

Understanding that everything in life happens because Allah wants it to happen is an essential component of happiness. There is no use in fighting against or being angry at the decree of Allah. A certain level of contentment comes with submitting to the One Who is All-Powerful and in complete control of your life. Accepting this and accepting what Allah has chosen for you in your life can bring your heart to rest.

Accepting the decree of Allah (ﷻ) can be difficult, especially during times of difficulty and trials. Understand that even the trials of life are part of Allah's ultimate plan for you. Allah, in His wisdom, knowledge, and justice, has decreed whatever difficulties



you experience. He knows what is best for you. He decreed every part of your life long before He even created the heavens and the earth; He will certainly reward those who accept His decree and are satisfied with what He has given them.

«The Prophet (ﷺ) said: The most enviable of my friends, in my estimation, is a believer with little property who finds pleasure in prayer, who performs the worship of his Lord well, who obeys Him in secret, who is obscure among men, who is not pointed out by people, and whose provision is barely sufficient, but with which he is content.

He then snapped his fingers and said: His death will come speedily, the women who bewail him will be few, and he will leave but a little behind.» (A reliable hadith recorded by Ahmad, Ibn Mājah, and at-Tirmidhi)

An example of being satisfied with Allah's decree is found in the story of the woman who had epileptic fits:

«Ibn 'Abbās (رضي الله عنه) said to me: Shall I show you a woman of the people of paradise?

I said: Yes.

He said: A dark-skinned lady came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said: I get attacks of epilepsy and my body becomes uncovered; please invoke Allah for me.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said (to her): If you wish, be patient and you will have paradise; if you wish, I will invoke Allah to cure you.

She said: I will remain patient. She added: But I become uncovered, so please invoke Allah for me that I may not become uncovered.

He invoked Allah for her.» (Bukhari)

This woman chose to patiently accept Allah's decree for her, hoping for His reward, instead of having the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) supplicate for her to be cured. She had achieved a high level of

faith; it is this type of satisfaction with Allah's decree that can bring contentment in this life.

### **Trust in Allah (ﷻ)**

﴿وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى الْحَيِّ الَّذِي لَا يَمُوتُ...﴾ (سورة الفرقان: الآية ٥٨)

«And put your trust in the Ever-Living One Who dies not...»

(Qur'an 25: 58)<sup>51</sup>

Trusting Allah is another ridge on the key of faith. It is calming to the heart to know that Allah is in control of your life and to trust that He will give you what is best. Allah knows what is best for you, whether it is difficult or easy. Ultimately, the reward is with Allah for bearing trials with patience and for being grateful to Him during times of ease.

Allah is the One Who answers the prayers and supplications of those who turn to Him. Trusting that He will answer your prayers and decree for you what is best for you, your life, your religion, and your end is a way to bring serenity to your heart.

﴿...فَمَا وَهَنُوا لِمَا أَصَابَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَمَا ضَعُفُوا وَمَا اسْتَكَانُوا﴾

(سورة آل عمران: الآية ١٤٦)

«...But they never lost assurance due to what afflicted them in the cause of Allah, nor did they weaken or submit...» (Qur'an 3: 146)

Allah certainly is near His slaves through His knowledge, hearing and sight. He knows every minute detail of your life; He hears and sees all that you do and all that happens to you. He knows what is in your heart and what you think and feel. He is the Lord of all creatures, the All-Powerful and Most Merciful. He, with His knowledge, is fashioning your life according to His wisdom. Trust Him. Trust that He knows what is best for you, and that He will only give you that. Indeed, Allah is the One Who rewards those who believe, those who are patient, and those who rely on Him.



«... وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ ...» (سورة الطلاق: الآية ٣)

«...And whoever relies upon Allah – then He is sufficient for him...» (Qur'an 65: 3)

### Life is a test

Knowing that this life is a test, that it is a means to an end, of which the end is the garden of paradise, helps us to view life in its appropriate light. When Allah tests us, it is incumbent upon us to be satisfied with that, to be patient through it, and hopefully to pass the test with increased faith and a strengthened heart. Tests and trials are from Allah and are meant to strengthen the hearts of the believers, expiate any sins, and qualify them for entry into paradise. Allah informs us:

«وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ  
وَالضَّرَمَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ» (سورة البقرة: الآية ١٥٥)

«And We will surely test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruit, but give good tidings to the patient.»

(Qur'an 2: 155)

We must all strive to demonstrate that we are indeed believers and deserve paradise, for paradise is the ultimate end for those who pass the tests of this life without losing faith. Realizing that this life is just a test should minimize the suffering we face due to any trials. It is this awareness of the tests from Allah that helps create happiness and satisfaction. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«If three of a Muslim's children die, and he remains content with that, they will be a protection for him from the fire.

A woman who was with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) asked: Or two, Messenger of Allah?

He replied: Or two.» (Bukhari and Mâlik)

### Value life for what it is

Another component of the faith key to happiness is assigning the appropriate value to the life of this world, which is temporary, fleeting, and a passing amusement. It will no doubt come to an end for everyone, leaving only our deeds to accompany us into the next life. The life of the hereafter is indeed the eternal life; it is the real life beyond this temporary world. Allah clarifies this for us:

«اعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهُمْ زِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ تَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيْجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَامًا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٌ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ» (سورة الحديد: الآية ٢٠)

«Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion, adornment and boasting to one another, competition in increase of wealth and children – like the example of a rain whose [resulting] plant growth pleases the tillers, then it dries and you see it turned yellow, then it becomes [scattered] debris. And in the hereafter is severe punishment [for the disbelievers] and forgiveness from Allah and His approval [for the believers]. And what is the worldly life except the enjoyment of delusion?» (Qur'an 57: 20)

Seeing life in this world for what it is – temporary – can make a huge difference in your level of happiness. Why allow yourself to become overwhelmed with grief, anxiety, anger or depression when this life is only fleeting?

«فَإِذَا نُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَلَا أَنْسَابَ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَلَا يَتَسَاءَلُونَ» (سورة مؤمنون: الآية ١٠١)

(سورة مؤمنون: الآية ١٠١)

«So when the horn is blown, no relationship will there be among them that day, nor will they ask about one another.» (Qur'an 23: 101)



It is only in paradise that people will know no grief. Allah confirms this:

﴿وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَذْهَبَ عَنَّا الْحَزْنَ...﴾ (سورة فاطر: الآية ٣٤)

«And they will say: Praise to Allah, Who has removed from us [all] sorrow...» (Qur'an 35: 34)

We cannot escape being subjected to some degree of trials and difficulties in this world; however, controlling our sadness over them is crucial because they are only a means to get to paradise in the next eternal life.

You should not let the life of this world divert you from the worship of Allah or divert you from knowing happiness. Lusting after the life of this world can only result in unhappiness and misery.

﴿أَلَمْ أَكُنْ مِنَ التَّكَاثُرِ ۖ حَتَّى زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ﴾ (سورة التكاثر: الآية ١-٢)

«Competition in [worldly] increase diverts you, until you visit the graves [that is, until you die].» (Qur'an 102: 1-2)

Becoming overly attached to this life only depresses a person. To know true happiness, you must place the correct value on this life. Seek the life of the hereafter. Know that this life will end and that you will be judged by your deeds.

The Prophet (ﷺ) worried that his Companions would be led astray because of worldly wealth:

«It was narrated that 'Amr ibn 'Awf (رضي الله عنه), who was an ally of Bani 'Âmir ibn Lu'ay and one of those who fought at Badr in the company of the Prophet (ﷺ), said: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) sent Abu 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrâh to Bahrain to bring the tax revenues from its people, for Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) had made a peace treaty with the people of Bahrain and appointed al-'Alâ' ibn al-Haḍrami as their ruler. Abu 'Ubaydah arrived with the money from Bahrain. When the Anṣâr

(the Muslim citizens of Madinah who gave refuge to the Prophet (ﷺ) and the other Muslim emigrants from Makkah) heard of the arrival of Abu 'Ubaydah (the next day), they offered the morning prayer with the Prophet (ﷺ); when the prayer had finished, they presented themselves before him. On seeing the Anṣâr, Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) smiled and said: I think you have heard that Abu 'Ubaydah has brought something?

They replied: Indeed it is so, O Allah's Messenger!

He said: Be happy, and hope for what will please you. By Allah, I am not afraid that you will be poor, but I fear that worldly wealth will be bestowed upon you as it was bestowed upon those who lived before you. Thus, you will compete amongst yourselves for it as they competed for it, and it will destroy you as it did them.» (Bukhari)

A person can forget about the true purpose in life (to worship Allah) and the goal (paradise) very easily by placing too much value on this world and by desiring the life of this world. Understanding the correct value of this life and its temporary nature becomes a vital part of the faith key to happiness.

#### *Do good deeds*

The last ridge in the faith key is to strive to do good deeds and to increase worship of Allah (ﷻ). The natural state of a person is in the worship of Allah alone. This is indeed the reason Allah created us, as He tells us:

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾ (سورة الذاريات: الآية ٥٦)

«And I [Allah] did not create the jinn and humankind except to worship Me.» (Qur'an 51: 56)

Fulfilling this natural state brings contentment, satisfaction, and fulfilment; it also fills the heart with the love of Allah, Who promises:



﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾ (سورة الذاريات: الآية ٥٦)

«Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer – We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.» (Qur'an 16: 97)

Doing good deeds can bring rewards from Allah, both in this life and the next. Allah can fill your heart with peace, happiness, love and satisfaction as a result of your striving in worship, along with your obeying Him and performing the deeds He loves.

«‘Abdullâh ibn Busr told of a desert Arab coming to the Prophet (ﷺ) and asking who was best among the people, to which he (ﷺ) replied: Happy is he whose life is long and whose deeds are good.

He asked Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) which deed was most excellent, and he (ﷺ) replied: That you should leave the world with the mention of Allah fresh on your tongue.» (An authentic hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalâni)

Good deeds bring happiness through the fulfilment of your obligations to your Creator. Looking for reward from Allah alone and knowing that Allah is the One Who will judge you with justice, based on your deeds, will inspire you to fill your records with many good deeds; in this life, the residual effects of doing so are happiness and a heart filled with light.

﴿...أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ﴾ (سورة الرعد: الآية ٢٨)

«...Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.» (Qur'an 13: 28)

Remembering Allah through words of praise and glorification is among the very best of deeds; in this great deed, hearts find calmness and serenity.

It was narrated that ‘Abdullâh ibn Mas‘ood (رضي الله عنه) said, concerning the chapters in the Qur'an known as *Bani Isrâ'eel* (*al-Isrâ'*), *al-Kahf*, *Maryam*, *Tâ-Hâ* and *al-Anbiyâ'*, “They are among the best of the earliest ones that I learned by heart.” (Bukhari)

Reciting the Qur'an is also among the best of the deeds that carry great reward from Allah. Therefore, doing good deeds and increasing worship and the remembrance of Allah are vital parts of the faith key of happiness.

### The thoughts key

The thoughts key includes the means to happiness through controlling the thoughts and focusing the mind. Its ridges are varied forms of thought patterns that lead to happiness.

### Controlling mind and thoughts

The first, and most broad, ridge of this key is controlling the mind and thoughts. Dr. ‘Â'idh al-Qarni writes:

Basic to the art of happiness is to bridle our thoughts and to restrain them, not allowing them to wander, stray, escape, or go wild. If you leave your thoughts to wander as they wish, then they will run wild and control you. They will open the catalogue of your past woes. They will remind you of the history of your misfortunes, beginning from the day that your mother gave birth to you. If your thoughts are left to roam, then they will bring to you images of past difficulties and images of a future that is frightening. These thoughts will shake your very being and will cause your feelings to flare. Therefore bridle them, and restrain them by directing them to the concentrated application of the kind of serious thought that begets fruitful and beneficial work.<sup>52</sup>



The power of the mind is unique and vast, so use it wisely. Control it; do not let it control you. Do not let Satan gain control of your mind, for he will surely drag you into despair.

Your thoughts can easily roam and drag you into depression and misery. In fact, negative thoughts are the greatest source of hopelessness, anxiety and fear. It is the way you think about your life, or a situation in your life, that results in either satisfaction or depression. Allah mentions:

﴿... وَجَعَلْنَا بَعْضَكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ فِتْنَةً أَتَصْبِرُونَ ...﴾

(سورة الفرقان: الآية ٢٠)

«...And We have made some of you [people] as a trial for others – will you have patience?...» (Qur'an 25: 20)

Ultimately you are the one who controls your thoughts and emotions; you can either cause yourself emotional suffering or you can create for yourself satisfaction and happiness. Thinking about situations in a positive light and submitting to the decree of Allah throughout your life are powerful ways to combat depression. Putting an end to negative thoughts that breed depression and unhappiness is essential to leading a happy life.

﴿وَقُلْ رَبِّ أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ هَمَزَاتِ الشَّيَاطِينِ﴾ وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ رَبَّ أَنْ يَحْضُرُونِ ﴿١٨﴾

(سورة مؤمنون: الآية ٩٧-٩٨)

«And say: My Lord, I seek refuge in you from the incitements [whisperings] of the devils. And I seek refuge in You, my Lord, lest they be present with me.» (Qur'an 23: 97-98)

#### **Focus on the positive**

Focusing on the positive aspects of your life is one way to control your mind. Certainly we all have enjoyable aspects of our lives, but sometimes we forget about those blessings from Allah.

﴿وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ﴾

(سورة نحل: الآية ٧٨)

«And Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing, vision and hearts [intellect], that perhaps you would be grateful.» (Qur'an 16: 78)

Even our senses such as hearing and sight, which most of us take for granted, are wonders for which we should be thankful. No doubt you have blessings in your life that please you and that warrant thankfulness to Allah.

What often happens during times of struggle is that people continue to brood over the difficult circumstances and the negative aspects of their situations, so much so that they cannot see any positive side to them. They become consumed with the disappointing aspects and fail to see the benefit or opportunity that has arisen.

Opportunities and blessings abound in everyone's life, such that there is always a reason to be happy. Even the gift of life itself and the opportunity to strive for paradise are blessings to be happy about and thankful for. (See Appendix C: Focus on Thanking Allah.)

﴿وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ﴾

(سورة إبراهيم: الآية ٧)

«And [remember] when your Lord proclaimed: If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favour]; but if you deny, indeed, My punishment is severe.» (Qur'an 14: 7)

#### **Live in the present**

Living in the present is another ridge on the thoughts key. Concentrating on what is happening to you at the moment can alleviate stress and anxiety over the past and the future, whereas



dwelling on the past and worrying about the future can bring despair and unhappiness to your soul. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Strive for what benefits you, seek the support of Allah, and do not give up. If something afflicts you, do not say: If only I had done such-and-such; instead, say: Whatever Allah decreed and willed, He has done. 'If' begins the work of Satan.» (Muslim)

Therefore, dwelling on the past and wishing you had done things differently will only bring dissatisfaction with Allah's decree and a lack of contentment with your life. Shaykh 'Â'idh al-Qarni has written:

When you wake up in the morning, do not expect to see the evening – live as though today is all that you have. Yesterday has passed with its good and evil, while tomorrow has not yet arrived. Your life's span is but one day, as if you were born in it and will die at the end of it. With this attitude, you will not be caught between an obsession over the past, with all its anxieties, and the hopes of the future, with all its uncertainty. Live for today: During this day you should pray with a wakeful heart, recite the Qur'an with understanding, and remember Allah (ﷻ) with sincerity. In this day you should be balanced in your affairs, satisfied with your allotted portion, concerned with your appearance and health.<sup>53</sup>

Being satisfied with the past, and trusting Allah in regard to the future, are cornerstones for enjoying the blessings of Allah in the present.

### *Measure appropriately*

This is one crucial ridge on the thoughts key to happiness. Measuring appropriately refers to how you look at events in your life. In other words, what criteria do you use to judge whether an event is good or bad?

A single event can be perceived as a success or a failure, depending on your perspective. For example, three athletes win gold, silver and bronze medals in an Olympic event. The gold medal winner is obviously the happiest because he came in first, but the third-place bronze medallist is often the next happiest. You may be wondering: why not the silver medallist? It comes down to measurements. The silver medallist may see his second-place result as a defeat; he is disappointed because he didn't get the gold. He is measuring his silver against the higher gold medal. However, the bronze medallist is just happy to be in the group of Olympic medallists; he had to have beaten many others to be standing on the medals podium. Unlike the silver medallist, he may be measuring his medal against not having one at all. He perceives his bronze as a victory, whereas the silver medallist sees his silver as a defeat.<sup>54</sup>

Happiness has much to do with how you assess your circumstances in life. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Look to those below you; do not look to those above you, for this makes you less likely to underestimate Allah's favours upon you.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Measuring appropriately and seeing events in your life from a positive perspective can bring happiness even in unpleasant situations. Measuring yourself against those with fewer blessings, who are less fortunate, can make you thankful and happy for what you have and for the seemingly difficult situations in your life. When measured against someone who is going through even more difficult circumstances or experiencing severe oppression, it makes your situation look relatively easy, or at least seem more bearable.

### *Hope*

Another ridge on the thoughts key to happiness is hope. Hope can calm your heart, allow you to accept trials and relieve your anxiety. Allah asks rhetorically:



﴿أَمَّنْهُوَ قَانِتٌ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَحْذَرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُو رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ  
...﴾ (سورة زمر: الآية ٩)

«Is one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], fearing the hereafter and hoping for the mercy of His Lord [like one who does not]...?»

(Qur'an 39: 9)

Hoping for Allah's blessings and mercy is soothing to the soul. It is part of being optimistic about life. Indeed, hope is a means of coping with difficulties in life, looking for and hoping for reward from Allah. Shaykh 'Â'idh al-Qarni has commented:

It has been said that happiness is an art that needs to be learned, and if you learn it, you will be blessed in this life. But how does one learn it? A basic principle of achieving happiness is having an ability to endure and to cope with any situation. Therefore you should neither be swayed nor governed by difficult circumstances, nor should you be annoyed by insignificant trifles. Based on the purity of the heart and its ability to endure, a person will shine. When you train yourself to be patient and forbearing, then hardship and calamity will be easy for you to bear.<sup>55</sup>

With optimism and hope for the best from Allah – for your trials to be eased, for success in your endeavours and for His rewards – you can endure trials, and your heart can be reassured and filled with happiness.

### **Slow down**

The last ridge on the thoughts key is to slow down. We can get so caught up in our schedules that we do not realize how much stress this produces. We go through life rushing here and rushing there, never having the time to take a moment for ourselves.

Rest. Relax. Slow down the pace. Make more room in your schedule so you do not have to rush. Always being in a hurry creates stress and therefore unhappiness. Take a deep breath and relax, even when you're late for something.

### **The sharing key**

The sharing key includes ways to happiness through sharing. It has a number of ridges that are based upon kindness and generosity to others.

#### **Be kind to others**

The first ridge on the sharing key is to be kind to others. Exuding happiness means being kind, gentle and caring, saying nice things, and giving compliments. When you share happiness in this manner, it is inevitable that some of that happiness will bounce back onto you. Being kind and giving compliments leaves a good feeling in your heart. Allah points out:

﴿قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أَذًى ...﴾

(سورة البقرة: الآية ٢٦٣)

«Kind speech and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury...» (Qur'an 2: 263)

Being kind includes avoiding arguments. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«The happy man is he who avoids quarrelling. Happy is the man who avoids quarrelling, happy is the man who avoids quarrelling; but how fine is the man who is afflicted and shows endurance.» (Recorded by Abu Dâwood and authenticated by al-Albâni)

Dissension and conflict only lead to hard feelings and unhappiness. Offering kind words instead can bring about happiness



for others as well as the self. It is also helpful to look for the good in those who may be antagonistic towards you. Everyone has both faults and positive qualities, so compliment people based on their desirable qualities and ignore their shortcomings. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Let not a believing man hate his believing wife; if he dislikes one quality in her, then he will be pleased with another.» (Muslim)

It was also narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«...When a Muslim visits his brother, Allah Most High says: You are happy and your walking is happy, and you will come to an abode in paradise.» (A 'reliable but odd' hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

Visiting your brothers and sisters in Islam for the sake of Allah is another means of showing concern for others and thereby sharing kindness and happiness. The opposite way is to be concerned only about yourself, like those people Allah describe as:

﴿قَوْلٌ مَعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أَذًى ...﴾

(سورة البقرة: الآية ٢٦٣)

«...Thinking about themselves [as to how to save their own selves, ignoring the others and the Prophet]...» (Qur'an 3: 154)<sup>56</sup>

This is a description of the enemies of Allah. They were not concerned for others, and they saw themselves as the centre of the universe. This attitude only leads to despair and to Allah's anger. Being concerned about the wellbeing of others, visiting them, and being kind and helpful to them creates a sense of satisfaction and goodness. It also has the end result of taking your mind off personal troubles, thus leading to happiness for the self and for others who received your kindness.

### Generosity

Generosity not only brings joy to the recipients, but it brings joy to your own heart. When joy is poured forth on others, some of it spills on you, too. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«The comparison between an almsgiver and a miser is like the example of two people who have two iron cloaks on them from their breasts to their collarbones; when the almsgiver wants to give charity, the cloak becomes spacious until it covers his whole body to such an extent that it hides his fingertips and covers his footprints (obliterates his tracks). When the miser wants to spend, it (the iron cloak) sticks; every ring gets stuck to its place, and he tries to loosen it, but it does not expand.» (Muslim)

Generosity not only earns a reward from Allah (ﷻ), but it brings contentment in this life as well. This is the idea behind the sharing of happiness: when you bring happiness to others by being generous and kind, the happiness they feel resonates with you. Seeing someone happy as a result of your good deeds towards them makes you content and lets you feel better about yourself.

### Forgiveness

Forgiveness brings contentment to your soul while at the same time producing happiness for others. Clearing your heart of grudges does a world of good for your own self; holding onto grudges and not forgiving only builds unhappiness in the soul.

﴿... فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ ...﴾ (سورة الشورى: الآية ٤٠)

«...Whoever pardons and makes reconciliation, his reward is [due] from Allah...» (Qur'an 42: 40)

Forgiveness is extremely commendable. It leaves the forgiven person feeling good, breaks down barriers of contention, and cleanses the forgiver's heart of animosity. In order to know true happiness,



you must cleanse your heart of rancour and enmity towards others. Ultimately, forgiveness is a means to that end.

### **Practice happiness**

The last ridge on the sharing key is to practice happiness. Sometimes if you force yourself to act in a certain way, even if you do not initially feel it, it will rub off on you. If you act as if you are happy, you can actually become happy as a result. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Verily knowledge is only acquired by the practice of learning.» (Bukhari)

If we apply this same theory to happiness, then happiness is acquired through the practice of being happy. In other words, if you smile, look for reasons to be happy, and act happy, then happiness will become a part of you.

The Prophet (ﷺ) was known to have a beaming smile. ‘Abdullâh ibn Ka‘b narrated that he heard Ka‘b ibn Mâlik (رضي الله عنه) say, after his failure to join the expedition of Tabuk (Ta-BOOK):

«When I greeted Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ), his face was shining with happiness, for whenever Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) was happy, his face used to shine as if it were a piece of the moon, and we used to recognize it (happiness) from his face.» (Bukhari)

Smiling is also considered to be charity in the sight of Allah. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Every good deed is charity. To meet your brother with a smiling face and to pour out from your bucket into his container are acts of charity.» (Recorded by at-Ṭabarâni; al-Albâni graded it as sound)

Not only can it make you happy and make others happy (because smiling is surely contagious), but it is considered to be a good deed that generates reward from Allah. Robert Louis Stevenson quite nicely sums up the ways to practice happiness:

1. Make up your mind to be happy. Learn to find pleasure in simple things.
2. Make the best of your circumstances. No one has everything, and everyone has something of sorrow intermingled with gladness. The trick is to make the laughter outweigh the tears.
3. Don’t take yourself too seriously. Don’t think that somehow you should be protected from misfortune that befalls other people.
4. You can’t please everybody, so don’t let criticism worry you.
5. Don’t let your neighbour set your standards. Be yourself.
6. Do the things you enjoy doing, but stay out of debt.
7. Never borrow trouble. Imaginary things are harder to bear than real ones.
8. Since hate poisons the soul, do not cherish jealousy, enmity and grudges. Avoid people who make you unhappy.
9. Have many interests. If you can’t travel, read about new places.
10. Don’t hold post-mortems. Don’t spend your time brooding over sorrows or mistakes. Don’t be the one who never gets over things.
11. Do what you can for those less fortunate than yourself.
12. Keep busy at something. A busy person never has time to be unhappy.<sup>57</sup>

With the faith key, the thoughts key, and the sharing key in hand, you have the means to create happiness for yourself, regardless of life’s circumstances. Being happy is definitely possible, and with it the heart is at peace. By increasing their level of faith, controlling their thoughts, and sharing happiness with others (through generosity, kindness and forgiveness), happiness is attainable for all Muslims. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:



«A happy frame of mind is one of Allah's favours.» (A sound hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Mâjah)

### PRACTICAL APPLICATION

At this point, a wealth of information has been written to direct the Muslim towards self-fulfilment. In order to make the most of this information, you must put this knowledge into practice and move towards a satisfying and fulfilling life in this world and the hereafter.

#### *Practical application in sixteen steps*

Before you start with these sixteen steps, you will need a pen and a calendar. Also, at the end of this section you will find blank pages for Remarks and a Goals Plan. You may need to bookmark those pages for easy access because you will be instructed to write in them. The sixteen steps are as follows:

#### **1. Re-read the chapter on 'Attaining self-acceptance'**

- A. Reflect on your view of yourself. Do you judge yourself harshly? Are you at peace with your imperfections? Decide who you are and who you want to be. Love and accept yourself.
- B. Write down certain characteristics about yourself, using only positive words to describe them.
- C. Write a personal mantra.

#### **2. Re-read the chapter on 'Building self-confidence'**

- A. Make a list of your positive traits and read this list aloud to yourself daily.
- B. Look in the mirror and say: I am beautiful. I am strong. I am wonderful.

#### **3. Re-read the chapter on 'Determination: Achieving your goals'**

- A. Make a list of specific goals that you want to accomplish in your lifetime.
- B. Choose one of the goals as a starting point, to be pursued first.
- C. Make another list. This time, detail the steps you need to take in order to accomplish the goal you have chosen.
- D. Give yourself deadlines for each step, and mark them on your calendar.
- E. Start immediately with your first step.

#### **4. Re-read the chapter on 'The art of self-observation'**

- A. Figure out what your personality type is and how that will help you master yourself.
- B. Review your background and let that help you decide what negative traits you would like to change.
- C. For women: make it a point to know when your hormonal cycle kicks in, and during that time, tread lightly around others. If your period is regular, you will benefit from marking on your calendar the days you expect your period; this will serve as a gentle reminder to avoid any stress.

#### **5. Re-read the chapter on 'Self-improvement: Making positive changes'**

- A. Make a list of spiritual changes you would like to make. Begin implementing them one at a time until they become habitual.
- B. Determine what strategies might help you in making positive changes. Write these strategies in your remarks.
- C. Write down all the changes you would like to make within yourself. Choose three of them; write them in your Goals Plan and begin to work on them immediately.



**6. Re-read the chapter on 'Stress relief'**

- A. Pick a method that you feel will work for you to release mental stress, and choose a time each day to implement it.
- B. Find a physical activity that you enjoy. Mark in your calendar times to do this. If you are not already active, start with once a week and gradually increase that to several times a week.
- C. Write down everything you eat each day for a week. Analyse it, from portion size to the healthfulness of the items. Make the necessary changes to implement a healthy diet.

**7. Re-read the chapter on 'Effective communication'**

- A. Review the list of the 'Dos of good communication', and pick out three things you need to work on. Write those down in your Goals Plan and start working on them. Once you have achieved those goals, come back and choose three more. Note: Focusing on three items does not mean that you ignore the rest purposefully. This is simply to allow you to master a little bit at a time, to achieve the greatest effect.
- B. At the same time, choose three "Don'ts of good communication" and work on those, coming back to the list when you feel you have achieved your goals.
- C. Seek knowledge about different cultures through books or the Internet. Take notes on what you find. Have open discussions with friends from other cultures about what you learn.

**8. Re-read the chapter on 'The path to forgiveness'**

Understand what forgiveness is. You should be able to answer the following questions: What exactly is forgiveness? What emotions are needed to forgive? Why should I forgive?

**9. When you have reached Figure 1.2 in 'The path to forgiveness', make a list of people whom you need, or would like, to forgive.**

This is an important step. Since this is a private exercise, do not be ashamed or feel the need to hide your anger towards someone. Let it out and deal with it. Once you have that list, you can move on to the next step.

**10. Re-read 'Part One: Achieving forgiveness'**

Note: Although these can sometimes be difficult exercises, you must push yourself to complete them. Also, refer back to **Figure 1.2** in 'The path to forgiveness' to keep it clear in your mind.

- A. Apply 'Objective recall' and 'Empathy' to the persons on your list. Write down your results so that you may review your thoughts at a later time.
- B. Apply 'Humility' and 'Gratitude' to yourself. Be open, be honest, and be true. It is hard to look in the mirror, but this is a private exercise, and no one but you can see the reflection. Write down what you see so that you can review the results later.
- C. Apply 'Look for good' and 'Excuse others as you would yourself'. Write down some excuses for and good qualities of the people you need to forgive.

**11. Once you are done with step 10, fill in the following paragraph for each person whom you need to forgive, writing it in your Goals Plan:**

I would like to forgive (insert a name). Although I feel that s/he has harmed me, s/he may have meant his/her actions or words in this way: (insert results from Step 10-A: 'Objective recall'). It is possible that I may have caused him/her harm in the following way: (insert results from Step 10-B, 'Humility



and Gratitude'). Finally, in all fairness, (insert person's name) has the following good qualities: (insert results from Step 10-C: 'Look for good' and 'Excuse others as you would yourself').

### 12. Re-read 'Part Two: Holding onto forgiveness'

- A. Review 'Verbalize' and its importance. Now read aloud the paragraph from Step 11 that you have written in your Goals Plan.
- B. Review 'Secret Gift'. Take your calendar and mark on it the date you will accomplish this goal. Write the date and intention in your Goals Plan.
- C. Apply 'Fasting and Supplication'. Mark on your calendar the days you would like to fast. Write those dates in your Goals Plan.
- D. Apply 'Avoid ruminating'. Do NOT backtrack. What is done is done, and it is best to move on.
- E. Apply 'Fear Allah' in all that you do. Don't forget that you are doing all of this to receive Allah's mercy.
- F. Review 'The Path to Forgiveness' as often as needed to get it right, so that you can let go and turn your energies to more important aspects of your life.

### 13. Re-read the chapter on 'Happiness'

- A. Write down your answer to the question: Are you happy? If your answer is no, make a list of items that make you unhappy. It is important to write down significant items, so that the changes you make will affect your life considerably.
- B. Take that list and apply the faith key. For each item, fill in the following paragraph in your Goals Plan:

(Insert item from Step 13-A: something that makes you unhappy) is the decree of Allah. I will trust Allah that (insert name of item) happened because Allah (ﷻ) knows best, and I do not. I understand that (insert name of item) is a part of my life test from Allah. I will value my life for what it is and do good deeds to counteract my unhappiness with (insert name of item). Hopefully, I will receive rewards from Allah.

### 14. Re-read the section 'The thoughts key'.

- A. Apply 'Controlling mind and thoughts', 'Focus on the positive', 'Live in the present', 'Measure appropriately', 'Hope', and 'Slow down' to your life. You should understand and start applying each of them in your life immediately.

### 15. Re-read the section 'The sharing key'.

- A. Apply 'Be kind to others', 'Generosity', 'Forgiveness', and 'Practice happiness' to your everyday life immediately. In your Goals Plan, write down ways in which you can achieve these goals, then follow your plan.

### 16. Review. Review. Review.

Review your Goals Plan often, even daily. This will help you focus on your goals and remind you of your intentions. Review what you have read in this book. This is important because you do not want to forget what you have learned; the more knowledge you have, the greater your ability to conquer your tests and trials and live a fulfilling life.

*Life is always a journey. Live it.*



# REMARKS

... (faint text) ...

14. Re-read the section 'The thought life'.

A very 'thoughtful' mind and thought. Focus on the ... (faint text) ...

15. Re-read the section 'The sharing life'.

A good, kind to others. 'Generosity', 'hospitality' ... (faint text) ...

16. Re-read the section 'The action life'.

Review your Goals Plan often every day. This will help ... (faint text) ...

Life is always a journey. Live it.

# GOALS PLAN

## NOTES

... (faint text) ...

... (faint text) ...

... (faint text) ...

... (faint text) ...

... (faint text) ...

... (faint text) ...

... (faint text) ...



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the meanings of the Qur'an have been adapted (with some changes to the text to clarify the meaning) from Saheeh International, *The Qur'an: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings* (Jeddah: Abul-Qasim Publishing House, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> 'Â'idh ibn 'Abdullâh al-Qarni, *Don't Be Sad* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2011), 132.

<sup>3</sup> Gillian Butler and Tony Hope, *Managing Your Mind: The Mental Fitness Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Wherever possible, Arabic terms have been translated into English. In cases where we have chosen to retain the Arabic, the transliterated word or phrase is shown in italics the first time it appears in the text; the term is also defined in the Glossary found at the end of this book. (Editor)

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance", in *Essays: First Series*, accessed December 7, 2011, <http://www.emersoncentral.com/selfreliance.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> al-Qarni, *Don't Be Sad*, 263.

<sup>7</sup> Sheikh Ahmed Fareed, *From the Characteristics of the Salaf* (Ipswich: Jam'iat Ihya' Minhaaj Al-Sunnah, 1996), 91.

<sup>8</sup> For further information on personality types, there are many books available, including: Otto Kroeger and Janet Thuesen, *Type Talk: The 16 Personality Types That Determine How We Live, Love, and Work* (New York: Dell, 1989) and Don Richard Riso, *Personality Types: Using the Enneagram for Self-Discovery* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Darussalam, *Selected Friday Sermons* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2000), 36.



<sup>10</sup> Allah has mentioned in the Qur'an:

﴿الَّذِينَ يَنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكَاطِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾  
(سورة آل عمران: الآية ١٣٤)

«[Those] Who spend [in the cause of Allah] during ease and hardship, who restrain anger and who pardon the people – and Allah loves the doers of good.» (Qur'an 3: 134)

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 46.

<sup>12</sup> Fareed, *From the Characteristics of the Salaf*, 33.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://islamqa.com/en/ref/254> for a discussion of this practice.

<sup>14</sup> Deborah Blum, *Sex on the Brain: The Biological Differences Between Men and Women* (New York: Viking, 1997), 79.

<sup>15</sup> (Qur'an 59: 23)

<sup>16</sup> *Mursal*: a category of hadith: a narration that a *tābi'i* (one who knew or met any of the Companions and transmitted hadiths from them) ascribes to the Prophet (ﷺ) without mentioning the Companion from whom it was taken.

<sup>17</sup> Ismā'eel ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, translated and abridged by a group of scholars under the supervision of Sheikh Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2000), 2:408.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 8:53.

<sup>19</sup> The anterior commissure (linking band of tissue) tends to be ten to twelve percent larger in women than men. Referenced from Blum, *Sex on the Brain*.

<sup>20</sup> Blum, *Sex on the Brain*.

<sup>21</sup> Sana Reynolds and Deborah Valentine, *Guide to Cross-Cultural Communication* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), xvii.

<sup>22</sup> Sonja Vegdahl Hur and Ben Seunghwa Hur in Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester, *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 275.

<sup>23</sup> Reynolds and Valentine, *Guide to Cross-Cultural Communication*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Elisabeth Bumiller in Lustig and Koester, *Intercultural Competence*, 270.

<sup>25</sup> A vignette condensed from cases by K. Cushner and R. W. Brislin, *Intercultural Interactions: A Practical Guide* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in al-Qarni, *Don't Be Sad*, 398-399.

<sup>27</sup> Qadi 'Iyad ibn Moosa al-Yahsubi, *Muhammad: Messenger of Allah: Ash-Shifa of Qadi 'Iyad*, trans. Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley (Granada: Madinah Press, 1991), 54.

<sup>28</sup> Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Ithaca: Spoken Language Services, 1976), 54.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 2:272.

<sup>30</sup> Everett Worthington, *Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001), 32.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>32</sup> Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language* (Madinah: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> al-Yahsubi, *Muhammad: Messenger of Allah*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Dr. Ali Muhammad Şallâbi, *'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb: His Life and Times* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2007), 238.

<sup>35</sup> 'Alee Hasan 'Alee 'Abdul Hameed, *Forty Hadith on the Islamic Personality* (Birmingham: Al-Hidaayah, 1995), 20.

<sup>36</sup> Fareed, *From the Characteristics of the Salaf*, 91.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

<sup>38</sup> al-Qarni, *Don't Be Sad*, 354.

<sup>39</sup> Fareed, *From the Characteristics of the Salaf*, 92.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>41</sup> al-Yahsubi, *Muhammad: Messenger of Allah*, 55.

<sup>42</sup> Fareed, *From the Characteristics of the Salaf*, 30. The Qur'an verse quoted is 3:134.



- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 102.
- <sup>45</sup> Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Saviours of Islamic Spirit* (Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1997), 2:44-45.
- <sup>46</sup> al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an*.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibn Katheer, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 8:543.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> "What is the definition of Happiness?", David Leonhardt, accessed December 7, 2011, <http://www.milwaukeehappyhour.com/index.php?section=articles&task=viewArticle&articleId=56>.
- <sup>50</sup> Guy Benintendi, "Happiness," *Health Realization News* (Boulder: Health Realization Institute, 2000), 4.
- <sup>51</sup> al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an*.
- <sup>52</sup> al-Qarni, *Don't Be Sad*, 90-91.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., 37.
- <sup>54</sup> Medvec, Victoria Husted, Scott F. Madey and Thomas Gilovich, "When less is more: counterfactual thinking and satisfaction among Olympic medalists," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69 (1995), 603-610.
- <sup>55</sup> al-Qarni, *Don't Be Sad*, 90.
- <sup>56</sup> al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an*.
- <sup>57</sup> Howard Golden and Penny Golden, eds., *Body Mind Spirit Guide* (Westland, MI: Golden Galleries Productions, 2010), 26.

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## APPENDIX A

### SELF-SUPPORTIVE STATEMENTS

Self-talk is a means of increasing your self-esteem and self-confidence; it is also a way to fight the negative whispers of Satan in your head. You must infuse yourself with positive self-talk on a regular basis, using statements that give you inner strength and increase your faith. Increasing reliance on and trust in Allah and His knowledge, justice, and decree can lift up anyone with contentment, assurance, and inner peace.

We have put together some suggestions for you to say to yourself daily or as often as needed. These will, inshallah, aid in your endeavour to strengthen your sense of self-worth, self-confidence and determination; they will also help you to accept Allah's decree for your life.

#### Self-supportive statements:

- I am a valuable person.
- I am wonderful, brilliant and amazing.
- I am talented.
- I will achieve my goals.
- I can handle this.
- I like myself.
- I am worthy of others' respect.
- My needs and feelings are as important as anyone else's.



I am lovable.

I am worth having as a friend.

I am capable and intelligent.

I am good looking/beautiful.

I am unique and creative.

I can accept my past and let it go.

I forgive myself.

I deserve the good things in life as much as anyone else.

I am flexible, open-minded and fair.

I can do anything I choose.

I **will** accomplish my goals.

I accept and believe in myself.

**Self-supportive statements that affirm and strengthen  
your relationship with Allah:**

*Qaddara Allâh wa mâ shâ' fa'al; mâ shâ' Allâh.* (It is the decree of Allah and He does what He wills; it is what Allah wanted.) Say either of these slowly, and let them seep into your heart.

Allah knows what is best for me.

Allah will give me what is best.

Oh Allah, I put my trust in You.

*Allâhu Akbar.* (Allah is the Greatest.)

*Lâ hawla wa lâ quwwata illâ billâh.* (There is no strength or power except with Allah.)

'Lâ ilâha illâ Allâh': There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah.

I will attain paradise, inshallah.

## APPENDIX B

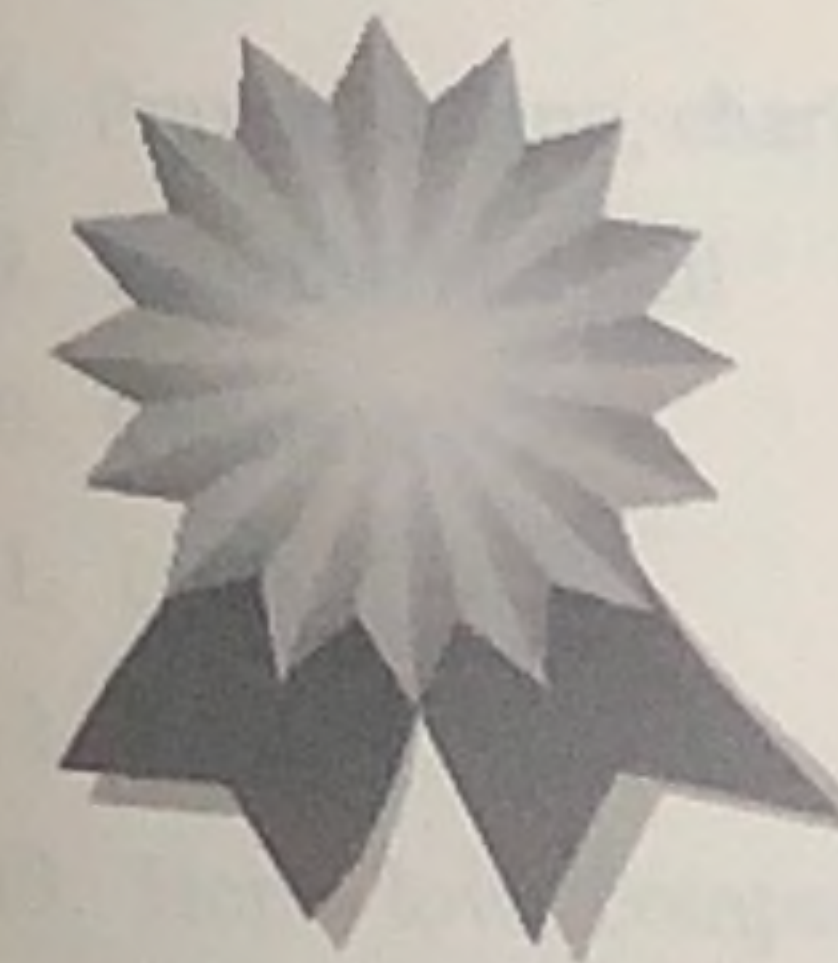
### FORGIVENESS CERTIFICATE

#### *Certificate of Forgiveness*

With this certificate I hereby forgive

\_\_\_\_\_

and commit myself to hold onto that forgiveness  
and clear my heart of any ill feelings.



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX B

### FORGIVENESS CERTIFICATE

#### Certificate of Forgiveness

With this certificate I hereby forgive

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## APPENDIX C

### FOCUS ON THANKING ALLAH

**I**t is important to focus on the positive on a regular basis. Sometimes it is easy to forget the blessings that Allah has bestowed on us. There are definitely many things to thank Allah for, but here are a few to ponder:

1. Islam
2. Guidance
3. The Qur'an
4. Allah's love and mercy
5. The angels
6. Allah's assistance
7. Faith
8. Prayer, fasting, charity and pilgrimage
9. Paradise and hell
10. Creation
11. Life
12. Earth
13. Hope, love, compassion and mercy
14. The prophets sent to guide humankind
15. Islamic brotherhood/sisterhood



## APPENDIX B

### FORGIVENESS CERTIFICATE

#### Certificate of Forgiveness

With this certificate I hereby forgive

and sign my part of my 15 blessings



## APPENDIX C

### FOCUS ON THANKING ALLAH

**I**t is important to focus on the positive on a regular basis. Sometimes it is easy to forget the blessings that Allah has bestowed on us. There are definitely many things to thank Allah for, but here are a few to ponder:

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8. Prayer, fasting, charity and pilgrimage
9. Paradise and hell
10. Creation
11. Life
12. Earth
13. Hope, love, compassion and mercy
14. The prophets sent to guide humankind
15. Islamic brotherhood/sisterhood



16. The throne of Allah that will provide shade for believers on the Day of Judgement
17. *Hijab* (the veil ordained by Allah for believing women)
18. Prayers of the Prophet (ﷺ), the angels and the believers
19. Knowledge, understanding and wisdom
20. Family and friends
21. Ideas
22. Hearing and seeing
23. Emotions, senses and the immune system
24. Limbs and the ability to walk and speak
25. Food, clothing and shelter
26. Water, air and sunlight
27. Rain, snow, shadows and breezes
28. Laughter and tears
29. Creativity and recreation
30. Gardens and flowers
31. Transportation, occupations and opportunities
32. Knowing how to read and write
33. Birds' songs
34. Rainbows, seashells, shooting stars and the moon
35. Beauty
36. Honey, black seed, medicine, doctors, hospitals and aromatherapy
37. Herbs and spices
38. Self-acceptance, dignity, healthy self-esteem and optimism
39. Biodiversity
40. All the good and beautiful things of this life and the hereafter

## GLOSSARY OF ISLAMIC TERMS\*

<i>abu</i> (or <i>abi</i> )	أبو، أبي	father (of)
<i>Allâhu akbar</i>	الله أكبر	Allah is the Greatest
<i>âmeen</i>	آمين	O Allah, accept our invocation; amen
<i>Anṣâr</i>	أنصار	'helpers': the Muslim citizens of Madinah who gave refuge to the Prophet (ﷺ) and the other Muslim emigrants from Makkah
<i>astaghfir Allâh</i>	أستغفر الله	I seek Allah's forgiveness
<i>Eid</i> (' <i>eed</i> )	عيد	lit. festival; the two celebrations: one at the end of Ramadan and the other at the culmination of the Hajj
<i>hadith</i> ( <i>ḥadeeth</i> )	حديث	a statement or action of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that was remembered and recorded by his Companions and followers

\*The Arabic words are transliterated according to the conventions of the Transliteration Chart found in this book. If a word has become part of the English language (i.e., is found in a dictionary of Standard English), that spelling is used in this book and appears first in this Glossary, with the transliterated form in brackets after it.



<i>hijab (ḥijâb)</i>	حجاب	veil ordained by Allah for believing women
<i>inshallah</i> ( <i>in shâ'Allah</i> )	أن شاء الله	God willing
<i>jinn</i> (sg. <i>jinni</i> )	جن	non-human, rational beings created by Allah from fire, often referred to as 'demons' or 'devils'. They have free will like humans: some are Muslims, others disbelievers; some are obedient to Allah, others disobedient. Satan is a jinni. Some people try to 'foretell' the future by contacting a jinni. Some disobedient jinn mislead people into thinking that they can tell them what will happen in the future, near or far, or that the jinn can provide people with riches or some sort of power.
<i>lâ ilâha illâ Allâh</i>	لا إله إلا الله	there is none worthy of worship other than Allah
<i>mâ shâ' Allâh</i>	ما شاء الله	<i>lit.</i> '[It is] what Allah wanted'; an expression of appreciation for something someone has done
<i>mursal</i>	مرسل	a category of hadith: a narration that a <i>tâbi'i</i> ascribed to the Prophet (ﷺ) without mentioning the Companion from whom it was taken

<i>Quraysh</i>	قريش	the dominant tribe in Makkah at the time of the Prophet's mission; their society was based on polytheism
<i>Ramadan</i> ( <i>Ramaḍân</i> )	رمضان	the ninth month in the Islamic calendar; the month of obligatory fasting; the month in which the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed
<i>shaykh</i>	شيخ	teacher, mentor; scholar
<i>subḥân Allâh</i>	سبحان الله	glory be to Allah
<i>Sunnah</i>	سنة	the practice and collected sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that together with the Qur'an forms the basis of Islamic law
<i>tâbi'oon</i> (sg. <i>tâbi'i</i> )	التابعون	'successors'; those who knew or met any of the Companions and transmitted hadiths from them
<i>zakât (zakâh or zakât)</i>	زكاة	obligatory charity: an 'alms tax' on wealth payable by Muslims and to be distributed to other Muslims who qualify as recipients



# The Path to **SELF-FULFILMENT**

*The Path to Self-Fulfilment* seeks to uplift your inner soul and give you the necessary means to live a fulfilling life based upon both the love of Allah and the love and acceptance of the self.

Happiness is crucial to being able to love Allah. How could we really display and realise our love of Allah if we spent our lives in a depressed state? This book presents essential facets of self-fulfilment and happiness: self-acceptance, self-confidence, determination, self-observation, self-improvement, and stress relief. In addition, it addresses issues that are fundamental to healthy relationships, such as effective communication and forgiveness. As the end result of implementing this knowledge, the concept of happiness is examined, with detailed suggestions for learning to trust Allah, accepting Allah's will in our lives, and sharing our blessings.

## **About the author**

Umm Abdurrahman Sakina Hirschfelder has been practicing Islam for over two decades. She has studied at such notable institutions as George Washington University and the Institute for Islamic and Arabic Sciences in America. She holds a B.S. and an M.A. in Mathematics from Eastern Michigan University and is an avid researcher. Ms. Hirschfelder is a mother of seven and resides in Michigan, USA. Her book, *Who Is Allah? His Names and Attributes and their Significance to the Individual*, is also available from IIPH.